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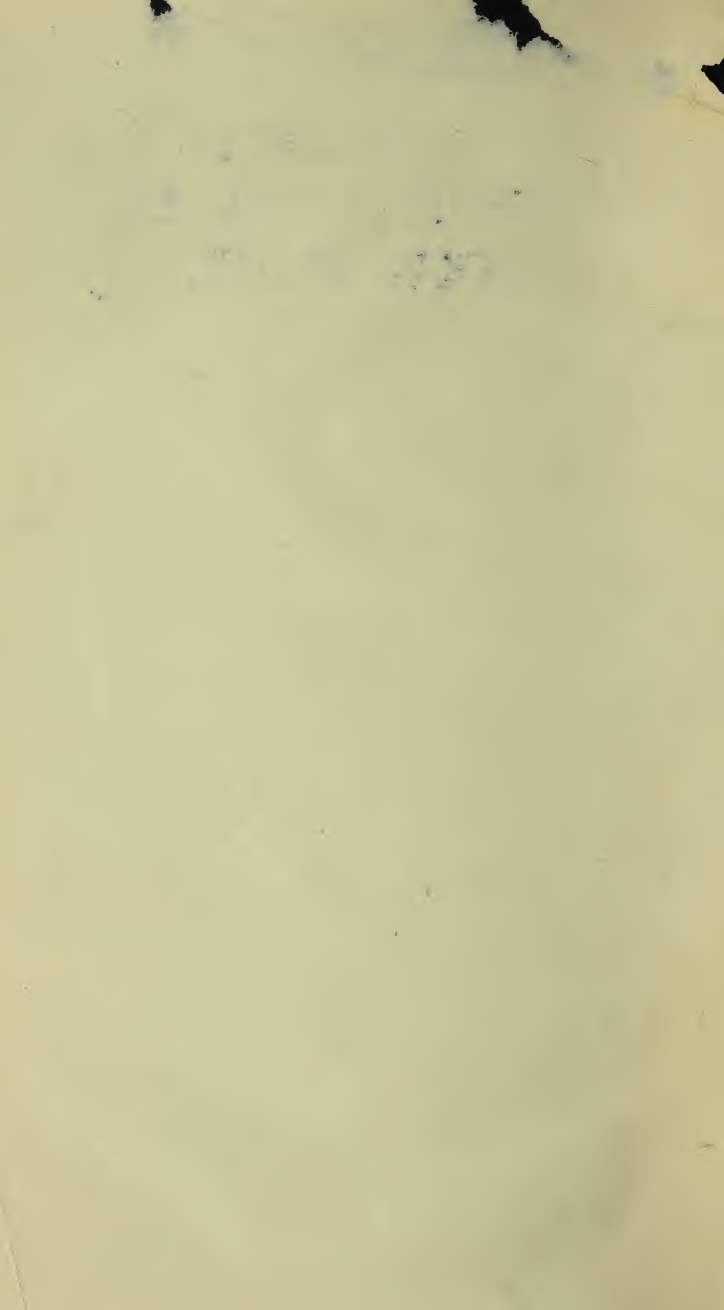
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LECTURES
John Chandler White
ON THE
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HISTORY

OF

ABRAHAM, JACOB, AND ELISHA.

BY THE

REV. HENRY BLUNT, A. M.,

670

RECTOR OF UPPER CHELSEA,

AND FORMERLY FELLOW OF PEMBROKE COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

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P R E F A C E.

IN offering another unpretending little work to the notice of the public, the Author has great reason to express his gratitude to God for the undeserved and unexpected success with which the former volumes have been favoured. That this success ought to have commanded greater diligence upon the present occasion, he is ready to admit; while he is at the same time bound to confess that increasing occupation in ministerial engagements, equal in importance to the more public duties of the pulpit, has very much withheld him from such additional attention as he could most earnestly have desired to bestow.

On this, as upon former occasions, he would disavow all claims to originality of exposition, to depth of criticism, to beauty or elaborateness of composition; his single attempt has been to speak plain truths in plain language; to convey to the hearts of the poorest and most uneducated of his hearers, by the aid of the Spirit of God, the doctrines and precepts of Scripture, as illustrated in the life of a faithful servant of God.

Coveting earnestly the largest portion of the blessing of the GOD OF ABRAM upon this most feeble instrument

of good, and desiring to be content with the smallest portion of human approbation which may be awarded to it, the Author commits his little volume to the press, with many prayers for the spiritual benefit of those into whose hands it may fall, and for the advancement of the glory of that Saviour whom he would desire to serve.

Chelsea, May, 1831.

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LECTURES

ON THE

HISTORY OF ABRAHAM.

LECTURE I.

GENESIS XII. 1.

“ Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee.”

THE history of Abraham is, on many accounts, one of the most interesting and instructive which the pencil of inspiration has ever drawn. The sacred historian has entered more into detail, has appeared to dwell longer upon the prominent features of the character, and has given us more pictures of the domestic life and manners of this patriarch than of any other. He has indeed occupied a larger portion of the sacred volume upon this single narrative, than upon the whole history of the world, from the creation to the time of Abraham. Nor shall we be surprised at the remarkable pre-eminence thus afforded to the subject of our present consideration, if we remember that Abraham was selected by the Almighty in an especial manner, and for an especial purpose ; no less indeed than to be the progenitor of a people to whom God should peculiarly reveal himself, whom he should invest with knowledge and privileges far above all other nations, to whom alone, he should, for a series of ages, commit the divine oracles, and of whom, “ as concerning the flesh,” the Messiah of God should come.

The life of so remarkable a person, therefore, as related to us by Moses, cannot but be an object of interest to all :--to the literary man as the only authentic history of a great and powerful prince, the fabulous accounts of whom he meets with in the early literature of almost every nation of antiquity ; for* the ancient Persians, the Hindoos, the Jews, the Lacedemonians, and the Arabians, all unite with ourselves in celebrating the name of Abraham ; to the Christian as a minute and circumstantial history of a man of God, who was honoured with the closest and most wonderful intercourse with the great Jehovah, whose life was regulated by that principle of living and influential faith, which he desires to be the one constraining principle within his own bosom, and who has obtained a portion so near the throne of the Most High, that to lie "in Abraham's bosom," is only another term for heavenly happiness and eternal bliss.

The first mention which is made of Abram in holy writ, is in the 11th chapter of Genesis, where we learn that he was the son of Terah, and born in Ur of the Chaldees. At the period when he was born, it does not appear that the knowledge of the true God was retained in its purity, by any single nation, or even by any single family among the sons of men. At the death of Noah, which occurred only two years before the birth of Abram, the unadulterated worship of the God of the Bible appears to have become almost extinct, for even the family of Abram, and, in all probability in his earlier years, Abram himself, were idolaters. Of this important fact in his history, we are informed in the book of Joshua, "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood (the river Euphrates) in old time, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: AND THEY SERVED OTHER GODS."

It was while living thus in his father's house, and not until he had attained the age of seventy years, that we are informed in the 11th chapter of Genesis, with the brevity of Scripture

* See Townsend's Chronological Arrangement, &c., *in loco*.

history, that "Terah took Abram his son, and Lot his son's son, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife, and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees to go into the land of Canaan, and they came into Haran, or (Charran,) and dwelt there, and Terah died in Haran." Had this been all that was recorded, we should have been left completely in doubt whether this removal from the idolatrous country in which he was born, were the spontaneous act of Abram's father, or a revelation of the divine will to Abram himself. By a reference, however, to the succinct account of the history of their forefathers, with which Stephen commences his address to the Jewish Sanhedrim, in the 7th chapter of the Acts, we find that "the God of glory APPEARED unto Abraham BEFORE he dwelt in Charran," and gave him the order for the removal of himself and of his family, so briefly recorded by Moses. 'This then was the commencement of that astonishing intercourse between the great Jehovah, and his faithful and obedient servant, which obtained for Abram the honourable appellations of "the father of the faithful," and the "friend of God." Whatever might be the nature of this appearance of the "God of glory" referred to by Stephen, it was obvious that it was such as to satisfy Abram of the reality of the command, and of the truth, and power, and faithfulness of Him who delivered it. It was not yet however fully obeyed; Abram and his father and family had left the land of the Chaldees, but had proceeded only to Haran, still three hundred miles distant from Canaan. Whilst they tarried at Haran, Abraham's father died; and it appears from the opening of the 12th chapter, that the command was again repeated to Abram in the words of the text, with the accompanying promises: "I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee; and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed."

The immediate consequence of this declaration was, that Abram, although so far advanced in life that he might not un-

naturally have expostulated against such a renunciation of his country, his kindred, and his home, at once obeyed the divine command; for we are told, "So Abram departed as the Lord had spoken," "and took with him Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran: and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan, and into the land of Canaan they came."

It is essential that at the commencement of a history from which we trust, by the aid of the divine Spirit, to derive much Christian edification and improvement, we should learn rightly to estimate the nature of that principle which formed the one great spring of Abraham's conduct, the motive of every act of holy obedience which marked his eventful life.

This, happily, is not left to conjecture, for the apostle to the Hebrews expressly says, "BY FAITH, Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, OBEYED, and he went out, not knowing whither he went."

His obedience then is at once declared to be the obedience of faith, the fruit of his entire trust in the promises, and dependence upon the word of that God, at whose command he went forth.

But before we can make any practical application of this to our own case, we must inquire still further into the nature and extent of this faith, that we may learn whether it be such that we ourselves may by divine grace be made partakers of it.

Abraham believed, then, without hesitation and without reserve, all that God had revealed to him—that he should become a great nation; improbable as it was, "he against hope believed in hope," and "staggered not at the promise through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; being fully persuaded that what he had promised, he was able also to perform;" that God "would bless them that blessed him, and curse them that cursed him;" that "he should be a blessing;" and above all, as the paramount mercy of the promise, that in

him, i. e. in his seed, even (as the Apostle to the Galatians explains it) in Christ Jesus the Lord, who should descend from his loins, all the families of the earth should be blessed.

We cannot profess to determine with what degree of clearness these wonderful truths were presented to the mind of the patriarch, but they *were* so presented, and with sufficient accuracy to be savingly received and duly appreciated, and to become as a mainspring of action most powerfully influential, we cannot doubt, without at the same time doubting the express declaration of our Lord himself, when he said, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to SEE MY DAY, and he saw it, and was glad." We believe, therefore, that in the words of this promise, a prospect, however imperfect and indistinct, was laid open to the eye of the patriarch, of the "DAY" of the Redeemer, of the time when he should come in the flesh, as a Son of Abraham, and by his one great sacrifice, bless for ever all the families of the earth, from the children of Adam to his last descendant; and we are corroborated in this view by that declaration of the apostle to the Galatians, in which he expressly states that "faith was preached before the Gospel unto Abraham," when it was declared to him, "In thee shall all nations be blessed." We believe therefore, that 'faith in that astonishing declaration of the Most High, a *prospective* faith in the only Saviour of the world, was the feeling which bound the heart of Abram to his God; which made it a matter of the most perfect indifference to him, what he should leave behind him, from whom he should separate, or whither he should go, if the Lord were his guide, and if an interest in these "exceeding great and precious promises" were indeed his own.

We have thought it necessary thus fully to consider two very essential circumstances in this opening page of Abram's history—1. The nature of Abram's obedience; and 2. The faith from which it sprung—because we believe that in the word of God, there are both commands and promises addressed to *all* to whom that word is sent, to induce them to act in a manner remarkably similar to the Father of the faithful

himself; while we still further believe, that it is only by possessing Abram's *faith*, that we shall be able to imitate Abram's *obedience*, or with him be willing to yield to the command, and to appreciate the promise, of the Most High.

I shall proceed, then, to endeavour to establish this assertion by pointing out, that there is in the word of God the strongest line of demarcation drawn between God's people—not his professing, but his believing and obeying people—and the people of the world; that to the latter, from their sins and their follies, their pleasures and their pursuits, there is as decided and distinct a command to come forth and be separate, and as positive a promise attached to the obedience of this command, as there was to Abram to leave the land of his nativity. “Love not the world,” says St. John, “neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.” “Be not ye unequally yoked with unbelievers,” says the apostle to the Corinthians, “for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, said the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.”

It is vain to say, as persons do often affect to say, that this command was peculiar to the first ages of Christianity, and that the *world* applies only to the world of *Gentile idolaters*. Had this been the view taken of it by our church, she never would have required from her members so distinct and positive a promise, still to “renounce the *world*, the flesh, and the devil,” putting them all upon an equality, and thus decidedly and unequivocally condemning “the pomps and vanities of this wicked world,” which form the very attractions which the people of the world, at the present day, and in every Christian country, love the most dearly and leave the most reluctantly. A sepa-

ration then, "in the spirit of your mind," from all these things, is commanded in Scripture, is enforced by our church, and must be conscientiously aimed at by every sincere believer who is desirous to walk in the footsteps of his father Abraham.

This is, we are aware, too often considered "a hard saying," and one against which the heart rebels more resolutely, and the world clamours more loudly, than against almost any other : but it admits of no compromise, no qualifying ; it is the word of God, and as such must be received entire, or rejected entire. It is not left to you to embrace the promise and to modify the command ; they stand or fall together. If you are of the world, the world will love its own ; you will be acknowledged, and courted, and flattered ; but then you must be prepared to stand with the world and fall with the world ; for "the friendship of the world is enmity with God," and his unerring word is pledged, that "the wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the people that forget God." If, on the other hand, you will come out and be separate ; if you are willing to be as the word of God describes the people of God, "a peculiar people, zealous of good works," "the world being crucified to you, and you unto the world ;" the word of God is equally strongly pledged that you shall be received and acknowledged, loved and directed, guided and supported here, and "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation."

Believing these to be the plain and positive injunctions of holy writ, and at the same time knowing them to be most foreign to the feelings of the natural man, how, as the ministers of God, are we to act towards you our hearers ? Are we "to prophesy smooth things ?" Are we to say—"It is true that you promised in your baptismal covenant to 'renounce the world, the flesh, and the devil,' but this only alluded to gross enormities ; the pleasures of the world can only become dangerous from excess, and with regard to its 'pomp and vanities,' the measure of them which you enjoy is extremely harmless ; be content, therefore, remain where you are ; God will not require so painful a separation ; continue the double service in

which you are engaged ; and while your heart is partially engrossed by the world, give to God all that you can reasonably afford Him of your time, your affections, and your talents, and he will require no more ?” Can we speak thus, my brethren ? Ought we, if we love your souls, to hazard, for the sake of a little short-lived popularity, these jewels of inestimable value ? No ; better, far better that we should become your enemy by speaking the truth ; better that we should become, with the apostles before us, “ as the offscouring of all things,” than that we should jeopard one soul committed to our charge, by modifying the terms of that message with which our divine Master has intrusted us.

The present is an age of great religious profession ; it is no longer considered discreditable as it might have been some few years since, to be seen scrupulously attending upon all the divine ordinances, or even to be known to read the Bible, and to pray in private. Thanks be to God, the increased and increasing growth of these things has comparatively silenced the scoffers ; and a man may now serve God, if not without the secret contempt of the ungodly, at least without their open ribaldry and scorn. All ranks and all classes have, in this favoured country at least, felt the powerful effects of that “ little leaven” which is slowly, but certainly, leavening the whole mass, and preparing for the bright display of that meridian sun which will, in God’s good time, throw its quickening beams into the darkest corners of this dark world of ours.

But while this is matter of real and heartfelt gratitude to every sincere follower of our Lord, it is not unaccompanied by its peculiar dangers and temptations. Many who, when a profession of vital godliness was more proscribed and ridiculed than at present, united with its enemies, and re-echoed the vapid joke, or joined in the empty sneer, are now found swelling the ranks of its nominal admirers. It is therefore more incumbent than ever upon ministers to state clearly, and beyond the possibility of misapprehension, what the Gospel really requires of its followers upon this point ; and it is as incumbent

upon the true and sincere friends of the Gospel, by their entire and visible and decided separation from the world of the ungodly, by their habitual conformity to the example and image of their divine Master, to evidence to all men that "they are not of the world, even as He was not of the world."

You will not, my Christian brethren, even now be enabled to do this consistently and conscientiously without exciting the remarks, and it may be, the censures or the ridicule of the foolish, the ungodly, and the profane. And although *persecution* is too strong a word to apply to the species of opposition to which you will be called, be assured there will be still much to prove your resolution, to try your faith, to exercise your love. You will sometimes find difficulties and opposition even from those to whom you are most closely connected, and from whom you reasonably expect to receive approbation and encouragement; but this must not be permitted to arrest or to deter you. When Abram first proposed to his relatives and friends his projected departure from the scenes of his childhood, the associates of his youth, the friends and counsellors of his maturer age; when he declared that he was about to turn away, and for ever, from all that interested and gratified those around him, what do you imagine must have been the feelings of his auditors? When he told them that he was about to seek a country of which he knew not even the name—in fact, of every particular of which he was utterly ignorant, except that the Almighty had pledged his word to conduct him thither; and that his own dependence upon his God assured him it would be worth his labour;—do you not think there must have been many an incredulous smile, many a secret sarcasm, many an open remonstrance? And in what manner was Abram able to meet these trying circumstances? He could avail himself of no argument to combat the objections of his friends, of no representations of worldly aggrandizement to silence their scruples, for he knew comparatively nothing of the enterprise in which he was engaging: but this he did know, that "He was faithful who had promised," and upon that simple de-

pendence he acted, and would have been content to act, though a world in arms had opposed his progress.

So must it be with yourselves. It is vain to talk of giving up the world, of separating from its follies, of renouncing its sins, until you have, as the apostle expresses it, "obtained like precious faith with him, through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." Without this, every step will be difficult and laborious, and in the end futile and disappointing. But once acquire, through the power of the Holy Spirit, freely offered to all who seek him, a full and complete dependence upon the word and promises of God, upon the merits and righteousness of your Redeemer, and all will be easy. With the love of God shed abroad in your heart, and the desire of obeying him here, and of living with him for ever hereafter, in full possession of your mind, no self-denials will be too great, no sacrifice too costly. Like Abram, you will be content to separate, "in the spirit of your mind," from every allure-ment which would detain you from the heavenward journey; and, like him, in obeying the command, you will inherit the promise, "I will bless thee, and thou shalt be a blessing;" you will not indeed necessarily become great and affluent, but then 'the little that the righteous hath is better than the riches of the ungodly,' and you shall assuredly be a blessing to all around you, as a son, a husband, a father, in fact in every relationship in life. Once having taken the decided step of declaring yourself for God, in opposition to the idolatry and follies of the world, you will be surprised at the daily and hourly manifestations of His providence and love, in diminishing your difficulties and sweetening your labours. You will find indeed that the yoke of Christ is easy and his burden light. For every evil companion you forsake, He will raise you up Christian friends; for every worldly pleasure you relinquish, He will present you with spiritual joys; and should you ever forfeit the countenance and affection of those, who *ought* to encourage you on the heavenly road, He will himself be more, infinitely more, than they have ever been, or can be to you—

your father, your counsellor, and your abiding and ever-present friend.

What more can you desire?—that the end of your journey should be prosperous? Do not for a moment doubt it. No; He who only promised Abram to show him the land, has promised you that it shall be your own; He will never leave you or forsake you until He has carried you to the haven where you would be; for your Lord has said, and He will bring it to pass, “Father, I will that they whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory.”

LECTURE II.

GENESIS XII. 7, 8.

“The Lord appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land; and there builded he an altar unto the Lord, who appeared unto him. And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he builded an altar unto the Lord, and called upon the name of the Lord.”

IN our first lecture on the history of Abram, we beheld him, in obedience to the divine direction, leaving the land of his nativity, and going forth into a land which God had promised to *show* him.

This was at present the whole extent of the promise regarding the land of Canaan; God had promised to show it to him, and he had fulfilled his promise, for we are told that Abram came into the land of Canaan, and “passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh.” The “place of Sichem” was that spot which was rendered famous in the next generation by the well of Jacob, and is known by every Bible reader as the Sychar of the New Testament, where the Saviour of the world, “wearied with his journey,” sat upon this well, and conversed with the woman of Samaria. It was about the middle of the land of Canaan, so that Abram had travelled over a large portion of his future inheritance, without receiving even a hint from the Almighty that this was the land which the Lord had promised to show him. In addition to this trial of Abram’s faith, we are told that “the Canaanite was then in the land,” an idolatrous and warlike people, the presence of whom must have tended to render the journey of the patriarch still more arduous and painful.

When, however, Abram had reached Sichem, we are told that “the Lord appeared unto him, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land.” The promise was now for the first

time revealed to him, that the land was not merely to be *shown* to him, but *given* to him ; and of this he was assured by the express word of God himself. It may not be unnecessary to remind you, that in all these instances in the Old Testament where it is explicitly stated, that “ God appeared,” so that there was some *visible* manifestation of the great Jehovah, independently of the *schechinah*, or divine glory, the difficulty of reconciling such appearance with the declaration of our Lord Jesus Christ, that “ no man hath *seen* God at any time,” is easily and scripturally surmounted by all who hold the true and catholic doctrine of the real divinity of our ever-blessed Saviour. He it was, even the second person of the Holy Trinity, who thus from time to time manifested himself, and in all probability in human form, to Adam and to Abram, and to Jacob and to Moses, and by this means kept up a continual expectation among the sons of men, of the time when he should in a still more remarkable manner take our nature upon Him, and dwell with us. It seems by no means impossible that the traditionary accounts of these primeval appearances of the Son of God, may have been the groundwork of the fabulous statements of the incarnations of their imaginary deities, which we meet with so frequently in the Hindoo, Grecian, and Roman mythologies. He then, even God the Son, appeared unto Abram, and promised that all the country through which he was travelling should be made over to his heirs for ever. No sooner had this astonishing annunciation been revealed, than we read, “ there builded Abram an altar unto the Lord who appeared unto him.”

This is the first time in the history of Abram, that any act of worship or sacrifice to the Almighty is recorded ; doubtless, it was a thank-offering, to express his gratitude to God for the promise He had just made of the land of Canaan to Abram’s posterity, and to mark, at the same time, his entire and unhesitating belief in it. The same circumstance is again recorded in the following verse ; after Abram had advanced still further through the country, and arrived at Bethel, “ there builded he

an altar unto the Lord, and called upon the name of the Lord." According to an eminent* Hebrew scholar, this might have been translated, "in the name of the Lord," in which case it would open to us a very beautiful development of the nature of Abram's faith; that he called upon Jehovah "in the name of the Lord," who had appeared unto him, even in the name of the Son of God. Marking by his sacrifice, and his prayer upon the sacrifice, his prospective faith in the one great atonement which should be offered for the sins of the world, and "in the name" of Him who should offer it.

It is extremely important that these acts of the social and public worship of Abram should be recorded, as a most valuable example to all the true children of Abram in every age and clime.

Consider for a moment the peculiar circumstances of Abram at the time he thus publicly performed them. He was travelling as a great prince, surrounded by a very numerous retinue, for we hear shortly after of "his three hundred and eighteen trained servants, born in his own house," and he was passing through a country, the inhabitants of which were idolaters. How instructive, then, must have been the example thus held forth by the father of the faithful. Whenever he stopped, though it were but for a night, there he was seen, unawed by the opposition, undaunted by the ridicule of the idolaters around him, building his temporary altar, assembling his family and his household, and together offering their sacrifices as types of the great atonement, and together worshipping the only true and living Jehovah.

It is not improbable that this was one of the motives of the Almighty for calling Abram to a life of such continual and painful travel; for if we trace the journeyings of Abram, we shall find that, in the course of them, the great majority of the nations then upon earth were visited by this man of God; that he was in fact the first Christian missionary, preaching the gospel, and living the gospel, in the sight of the inhabitants of

* Dr. Gill.

the world. We consider that there is no anachronism in asserting this, for we find St. Paul declaring that Moses "esteemed the reproach of *Christ* greater riches than the treasures of Egypt;" and that the gospel was preached to the Israelites in the wilderness, as well as unto us. Thus the Almighty "left not himself without a witness," for every part of the earth through which Abram passed possessed the edifying opportunity of beholding the worship of the true God in its purity, and of viewing those sacrifices which were appointed to keep up in the mind of the spiritual worshipper, a perpetual reference to "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."

There is something singularly interesting in this view of the motives and intentions of Abram's life of travel; it tends so greatly to exalt the mercy of the Most High towards his creatures, and to clear his justice in condemning these nations in after ages, for not liking to *retain* God in their knowledge, and for their neglect of those mercies once so visibly and strikingly offered them.

But, my brethren, it is time that we should turn from these historical statements, to the more immediate application of the example of Abram to our own business and bosoms.

You also are, like Abram, travelling through a country, the inhabitants of which are much given to the forgetfulness of the God whom it is your duty and your privilege to serve. Let me then inquire, are you in this respect following the example of that good man of whom we speak? The word of God has declared that "they which be of faith, the same are (in all ages and countries) the children of Abraham;" but then our Lord has added, "If ye were the children of Abraham, ye would do the works of Abraham." Let me then inquire: wherever you are, or however engaged, do you remember to honour God openly and unhesitatingly? It is easy to honour Him in the presence of his friends, but are you equally willing to do so, when in the society of his enemies? The great trial to Abraham's faith was, that "the Canaanite was then in the land;" that wherever he pitched his tent and erected his altar, there

were the despisers of God to oppose or to ridicule. And in some sense the Canaanite is *still* in the land. Is this a matter of the same indifference to you that it was to Abram? and are you ready to declare yourself in favour of the commands, and the ordinances and the people of God, at *all* times and in *all* companies? When others neglect what you believe to be the will of God, do you persevere in the practice of it? When others disparage those whom you, in your heart, believe to be the people of God, do you defend and support them? In these respects the cowardice, or rather the faithlessness, of men is perfectly astonishing, even to those who know the weakness of our fallen nature.

There is, however, a very striking evidence twice given in the text to the faith and courage of Abram, which it is my intention, in the remainder of the present discourse, to adopt more peculiarly as a test of our own. We have seen that he never pitched his tent, even for a night, without erecting an altar to God, and assembling his numerous household to the worship. Are you, then, my brethren, equally careful in the observance of this great duty? Do you erect in all your dwellings the *family altar*, and assemble your households, and together call upon the name of the Lord? or are you strangers to this important and valuable duty? Do you content yourselves with your own devotions, and leave your family and household, those whom God in his good providence has brought beneath your roof, to live, and, as far as depends upon you, to die in ignorance of Him “whom truly to know is life eternal?” If this be so, it is our painful duty to assure you, that as Christian masters of families, you are neglecting a very important branch of your duty to your Master which is in heaven. He who is “no respecter of persons,” will require an account from you of every soul committed to your charge. He will ask—“While under your roof, had they the opportunity freely offered them of attending the house and sacraments of God? Were they ever spoken with upon the importance of these things? Did they ever hear the word of God read?

Were they ever assembled for the purpose of family prayer?" These are inquiries which will one day be made of you:—will you reply to all or any of them in the negative? Will you say—"It is true, I was the master of a Christian household for ten, twenty, thirty years together; but I never thought it necessary during that time, that as a family we should bow the knee to Thee, or name together the name of Jesus."

My brethren, these things ought not so to be; you cannot offer one reasonable and satisfactory excuse why they should be so: you will not tell that God who seeth in secret, that you have no time for these duties, that you cannot spare one quarter of an hour, morning and evening, for God; that you cannot rise sufficiently early in the morning, and that in the evening the nature of your amusements, and the hours they compel you to keep, would ill harmonize with the observance of such religious duties. Can you, in your conscience, believe that the God of heaven and earth will be so mocked? You do not believe it—it is impossible; you would not venture upon such an excuse to him. O do not pretend to satisfy yourselves with so shallow and so false a subterfuge!—yes, we are compelled to say, so *false* a subterfuge. The real reason often lies much deeper; an unholy shame of being accounted too earnest in religion, of paying more respect to it than the rest of the world; or a consciousness that family prayer would be too much at variance with your present mode of life, and would sit awkwardly and uneasily upon one who was living, and desirous to live, as those around him live, to ease, to pleasure, and to sin; or, though last, perhaps the greatest, the fear of the world's dread laugh, which is often omnipotent where the fear of God is, alas! powerless:—these too frequently are at the bottom of this neglect of God in our families. What will the world say? what will my friends think? are motives sufficiently strong in many minds to resist the plainest dictates of duty, or to disarm the strongest compunctions of conscience. My brethren, believe me, they will not always be thus guiltily powerful; there is a time coming, when you will be yourselves surprised that the

fear of the world, or the love of the world, was ever permitted to weigh with you, even as the light dust upon the balance; when all that you might have done for God, will appear far, far too little; when all that you have neglected to do for Him, for the paltry considerations to which we have alluded, will form a subject of everlasting astonishment to your own soul; and when those solemn words of our Redeemer, will assuredly be fulfilled, “Whosoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed when he cometh in the glory of his Father with his holy angels.”

Cut off therefore at least this one source of self-condemnation; delay no longer to erect the family altar, and to “call upon the name of the Lord;” to read the word of God to your household, to confess together before God as a household your family sins, to acknowledge together your family mercies, and to petition together for family blessings.

Where this is done regularly and conscientiously, it is seldom without its immediate reward, in the advancement of domestic union and harmony, and in the promotion of an increased feeling of religion in yourself and in your household. Duties such as these indeed, when faithfully performed, will not and cannot want a blessing, because they will not and cannot stand alone. They will, under the divine teaching and guidance, lead you carefully to review the whole tenor of your life and conversation, and to compare it with the dictates of that book which you esteem of sufficient authority to present before your assembled family. When you read, day after day, in the hearing of your children and domestics, that many of those things which are most “highly esteemed among men are abomination in the sight of God;” that “all things are naked and open before Him with whom we have to do;” that “banquetings, revellings, and such like,” are classed in the word of God with “murders, drunkenness, and adultery,” as among those works of the flesh of which “they that do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God”—you will, perhaps, by God’s

blessing, be led to ask yourself respecting many of the pursuits and pleasures in which you now so thoughtlessly engage, "Am I not contradicting, by my life, what I am daily reading with my lips? How can I act as a priest of the living God in my family, and then go forth in the morning to the daily duties of life, in an unchristian, unholy, or uncharitable spirit? Or how can I return at night from the society of the thoughtless, the worldly or the profane, or from those places in which the name of God is habitually blasphemed, by the sinful and ridiculous association, in which we find it, and with senses impaired by fatigue, or excited by conviviality, or distracted by vain and thoughtless company, hope to draw near with acceptable feelings to the domestic altar, or take the holy word of a perfectly pure and heart-searching God within my lips?"

These are considerations so solemn, and at the same time so undeniably scriptural and true, that we cannot but feel assured that if they were allowed their due weight, and followed out to their just and reasonable conclusions, they would, under the divine blessing, tend most materially to raise the tone of Christian feeling and conduct throughout our congregations. The clear and positive and scriptural duty of family prayer would be no longer neglected; your servants would again become what they now have, in too many cases, ceased to be—an integral portion of your families, regarded by their masters, and regarding them with feelings of affectionate fidelity in return. Your children would see that you practised what you heard, and really thought God worthy to be served at some little sacrifice of ease and self-indulgence; and you yourselves would possess the inward satisfaction, that if a demoralizing, revolutionary, infidel principle be indeed spreading through all the ranks and orders of men, you had, at least, in your own little sphere, not hesitated to stand in the gap, and to stem the tide which is breaking up the foundations of society, and which, although yet at a distance, may shortly be upon our own shores. The blessed consequence would be that the promise of God would be fulfilled to us, "When the enemy shall come in like

a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him."

Family worship, however, great and important as it is, is not the only public duty towards God, to which I would endeavour to incite you by the example of him whose history we are considering; for it by no means stands alone among the number of obvious and neglected services. Bear with me then a few moments longer while I endeavour to impress another duty upon your memories and your hearts.

You have assembled this day in God's house of prayer and praise, and you are invited to draw still nearer to Him at that altar which commemorates the dying love of the Redeemer, and presents to us his body broken and his blood poured forth for man. Here then is another command, which, as Christians, you cannot doubt, and yet of which alas, ! so many are neglectful. Why, let me ask, are *any* of a Christian congregation, except those whose professional duties oblige them, absent when we assemble round the altar of Christ? Do we not all acknowledge, and ought we not all to love the same Saviour! Ought we not all to be looking to the same blood to cleanse, the same righteousness to clothe, and the same Spirit to sanctify us? Should we not all equally tremble at the thought of being excluded from the same table hereafter? Why do we then make a separation here?

YOUNG MEN: is it because you possess some feelings of a false and unholy shame to be so engaged? We honour the scruples of a tender conscience, however mistaken; but we are afraid that too many have no better and no wiser reason than this false shame, for absenting themselves from a duty equally binding upon all. When the "Canaanite was in the land" then, *you* would not have stood with Abram at his altar: you will not be found ranged on the Lord's side in the day of battle; neither then can you hope to be among his people when they rejoice in the day of his great and final victory, "as men rejoice when they divide the spoil." Or must we attribute your absence to another motive? Is it because the licentious-

ness of your habits in private tells you too plainly and too truly, that while you thus live, the altar of the Lord is no place for you? O, if it be so, pray earnestly, faithfully pray, that God may grant you a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within you.

YOUNG WOMEN: why do you absent yourselves from the table of the Lord? Is it because you have suffered the trifles, the worthless trifles of the world, vanity, pleasure, dress, so to occupy your thoughts, and hearts, that you have no real feelings for these high and heavenly ordinances, no heartfelt love for him who appointed them? If it be, may He whom you have forgotten, “open your hearts,” by the gentle influences of his grace, as he did the heart of Lydia of old, to “attend to the things” “belonging to your peace, before they are hid from your eyes.”

MEN OF BUSINESS AND OCCUPATION: why do you absent yourselves from the table of the Lord? Is it because your whole time and thoughts are so engrossed by the perishing things in which you are engaged, that you have never yet even so far reflected upon the purposes for which you were sent into the world, as to feel that you are sinners, and to fly to the Saviour for relief? May it please God to write these solemn words upon your consciences—“What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul; or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”

PERSONS ADVANCED IN LIFE: why are you absent! Is it because you have so long neglected this ordinance, or the Saviour who instituted it, that you cannot rouse yourselves from your lethargy, though the opening grave be yawning at your feet? May you be brought to know that the “hoary head is a crown of glory” only “when it is found in the way of righteousness!”

My beloved brethren, I do not, God knows, say these things in bitterness of spirit, but with a single heartfelt desire for you and for your salvation. I would, if your time would permit, address you thus separately and individually, and would ask

you all and each, why you thus trifle with a positive command of your dying Lord, the obligation of which I am certain not one among you would venture to dispute.

But it is enough. I will not urge you to that as a mere command, which you cannot perform acceptably and profitably unless you regard it as one of your highest privileges and choicest blessings. Once obtain, by the prayerful application of God's good Spirit, a real abhorrence of sin, a sincere love for the Saviour, a disregard for the opinions, and a disrelish for the sinful pleasures of the world, and there will be no need to urge, to expostulate, or to entreat. Like Abram you will never pitch your tent without erecting your altar, and offering up your sacrifices of praise and prayer in the midst of your assembled households; you will never hear the invitations to the table of the Lord, without rejoicing in the opportunity it affords you of drawing still nearer to the God of all your mercies. You will look forward to the day of the Lord, and the house of the Lord, and the supper of the Lord, as the bright spots in your earthly pilgrimage, the green and tranquil resting places in your weary journey, where you may "with joy draw water out of the wells of salvation:" and to you, communion with your Redeemer, whether in private or in public, in his word or at his table, will be the looked for, longed for, anticipations of an intercourse which shall never fatigue—of a communion which shall never end.

LECTURE III.

GENESIS XIII. 2.

“ And Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold.”

THE patriarch, whose history we are pursuing, had been but a short time in the land of Canaan, that country which is described as above all other countries in richness and fertility, when the providence of God so ordered it, that there was “ a famine,” “ a grievous famine in the land.” This was a new trial to the faith of Abram, and to his dependence upon his God. He had advanced to the very heart of the territory, which had been esteemed worthy of two such remarkable promises, and of two personal appearances of the great Jehovah ; and now that Abram had forsaken all for it, what had he obtained ? The grant of a country which could not maintain its own inhabitants. And is this the manner in which the Almighty keeps his promise to the ear, but breaks it to the apprehension ? Yes, my brethren, so the natural mind will argue ; so the hesitating believer will fear ; but as his subsequent conduct proves, so did not Abram either argue or fear. To remain in Canaan was impossible ; the natural determination, therefore, would have been to have returned to his own land, where he might feel assured of meeting with the abundance from which he had been called. Was this then the manner in which Abram acted ? No, he followed the dictates of divine grace, and rejected the cowardly suggestions of carnal nature. He went boldly forward, turning his back still upon the bounties of the land of his nativity, and passing directly through the barrenness of Canaan into Egypt, where there was a sufficiency for himself and his numerous retinue.

My brethren, do I speak to any among you who have been led by the sovereign grace of God, to choose with Mary that good part which shall not be taken away from you ; and who

have already found that the Christian profession is something more than a name ; that if the cross of a crucified Redeemer be indeed faithfully taken up, it will involve you in trials and difficulties of no ordinary nature ? Have you experienced this, and do you begin to fear that the promised land upon which you have entered, is not that fertile flowery mead which your imagination had portrayed ? That you have entered upon a course requiring daily and almost hourly self-denials : the restraints of the natural will, the subjection of the natural temper, the coercion of the natural inclinations ? That where you expected to be “satisfied with good things,” there are seasons,—but, blessed be God, they are neither long nor numerous, although to the truest believer not wholly unknown,—when even the food of the good land, the best of all lands, appears to fail you ; and when, though there be “bread enough and to spare” in your Father’s house, you fear lest you should perish from hunger ? These are intended to be to you, what the famine of Canaan was to Abram, trials of your faith, tests of your consistency, and perseverance, and dependence upon God. At such seasons do the natural feelings of our fallen nature ever tempt you to *return* ? Do they suggest to you, this is, after all, a barren course upon which I have ventured ; its joys are few, its trials numerous, its restrictions grievous ; would that I had been content to remain among the people of the world, where there was a far greater abundance of enjoyment, infinitely more of pleasure, and less of privation and toil ? In moments such as these, my brethren, and there are few to whom such moments come not, believe that the suggestion is the voice of your soul’s worst enemy, of him who never counsels but to ruin and to destroy ; close your ear to his delusions, and open your heart to your Redeemer : tell Him your difficulties and your troubles, and in his strength, “forgetting those things which are behind, press forward to those which are before ;” the dark and lowering season will soon be over, the sky will clear, and the bow of promise will again be seen in the cloud.

To encourage you to perseverance, under the most discouraging aspects, remember that one of the highest testimonies borne by the Spirit of God to the faith of the patriarchs, in the New Testament, is grounded upon their conduct in seasons such as this. "If they had been mindful," says the apostle to the Hebrews, "of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned;" *that* which we are considering was precisely one of those opportunities. "But now they desire a better country, that is a heavenly, wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for he hath prepared for them a city." When therefore, in a spiritual sense, "the fig-tree does not blossom, and there is no fruit in the vine;" when you have, like the patriarchs of old, not only opportunity, but strong temptation to return; when the pleasures of life assume their most fascinating garb, or the business and occupation of life their most engrossing aspect, and endeavour to win back the vantage ground in your mind's affections, from which the Spirit of God has driven them: like Abram, resolve to forget the country whence you came out, and to press forward only with greater ardour, and more enduring perseverance, to that better country, even the heavenly, which is promised you. With the eye of faith fixed on the cross of your Redeemer, look calmly and cheerfully forward; "with Him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." He is gone to prepare a place for you, where the joys will be infinitely superior to all the petty gratifications which are now so strongly contesting with Him the power to influence your heart; and most assuredly He will not desert you by the way: "in the end you shall reap, if you faint not."

It was during the period of Abram's short but necessary sojourn in Egypt, that we find one of the few instances of the sinful fear of man, and faithlessness towards God, which marred the fair outline of his otherwise perfect character. The inspired historian, with that fidelity which always marks his pen, and which forms one of the great beauties of Scripture biography, invariably portrays the failing as accurately as the

virtue, neither extenuating the one, nor emblazoning the other. He recounts the painful fact that Abraham, tempted by the danger to which he thought the beauty of his wife might expose him while sojourning among the sensual Egyptians, desires her to call herself his sister. An evasion, which, like most other deviations from the line of duty and of truth, only hastened the calamity which it was intended to prevent.

Some commentators* have taken great pains to prove that this was so common a mode of expression in those early times, and in those eastern countries, that there is little weight in the charge of equivocation thus brought against Abram. It appears, however, far more in accordance with the spirit of truth, in cases such as these, like the subtilty of Jacob, and the denial of Peter, to acknowledge at once that they were sins,—sins unjustifiable by any human reasoning, but yet susceptible of pardon through the blood of the atonement, and as the event has proved, pardoned by the infinite mercy of God. He it is who alone hears the secret sigh, and watches the silent tear, and accepts the heartfelt contrition of which all human biographers must be for ever ignorant, and yet which form a large and blessed portion of the communion between a deeply penitent soul and its pardoning God. And therefore he it is who, while the world may remember with unkindly triumph the failings even of the most truly penitent believers, has himself “for his own name’s sake, passed by their transgressions, and will not remember their sins.” It is not necessary that the *repentance* should in all cases be recorded even by the pen of inspiration; but it is necessary, in vindication of the truth of God, that the *sins* even of the holiest should not be suppressed, since they tend the more fully to establish, by the conduct even of the best of men, the truth of that Scripture declaration, which affirms that “*all* have sinned and come short of the glory of God; that “there is none that doeth good, no not *one*,” not the father of the faithful himself; that we have but one example, which we cannot follow too closely or copy too minutely, even the

* See Calmet’s Dictionary, Art. Abram.

Lord Jesus Christ, for he alone was "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners."

The famine in Canaan having ended, the patriarch returned from Egypt, where, as we have seen, he had taken up his temporary sojourn, and "went up, he and his wife and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the south." "Abram," continues the inspired historian, "was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold; and he returned to Bethel, unto the place of the altar which he made there at the first, and there Abraham called on the name of the Lord."

"How hardly," said our blessed Saviour—"How hardly shall a rich man enter into the kingdom of heaven;" yet here was one who was "very rich," and yet esteemed the love of God and the service of God, his highest honour and his greatest wealth.

My brethren, you whom it has pleased God to call to the higher and more influential stations in society, I would earnestly desire you to remember, that in reviewing the life of Abraham, we are reviewing the life not only of a very good man, but of a "very rich" and powerful man; one who, as the prophet expresses it, was laden with as much "*thick clay*,"* and beset by as many temptations, as (considering the different circumstances of society) the wealthiest among yourselves. Yet this rich man, in the midst of his abundance, still thought the service of God his chief good, and the hope of a better country his richest inheritance. Permit me, then, to apply the example of the patriarch more especially to yourselves; it is a valuable opportunity, and must not be neglected: we do not often read of the wealthy ones of the world among the people of God, for we are expressly told, that "not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called." Let me, then, inquire of you who are placed in the middling and higher classes of society, whether, although rich in silver and gold, you are content, with Abram and with Moses, to "esteem the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt;" whether

* See Hab. ii. 6.

you can truly affirm with the apostle, that you are willing to reckon "all things but *loss* for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord," and to "count them but dung that you may win Christ, and be found in him?" Or, on the contrary, when riches increase, do you set your heart upon them? and are you fostering that most unscriptural and yet too common misapprehension, that the rich and the poor cannot be tried by precisely the same laws, and subjected to precisely the same penalties, by Him who shall come to be our judge? Few, perhaps, will freely confess that they are thinking thus; and yet how often in society do we find a tacit acknowledgment of so unholy a proposition? that the same strict observance of God's laws and his sabbaths, the same self-denying application of the great truths of the gospel, can hardly be expected from persons of rank and fortune, as from persons in poverty and obscurity; that the intrigues and the duels of the wealthy are sins of a very different colouring from the adulteries and murders of the vulgar; that the former have infinitely more temptations than the latter, and that, therefore, great allowances should no doubt be made for them.

If by this it be only meant that we, their fellow-mortals and fellow-sinners, should make the greatest allowances in passing an opinion upon their character and conduct, remembering that their difficulties and impediments are greater than our own, the observation is most true, and few would desire to controvert it: we cannot be too cautious, too careful, too charitable in judging others, more especially when they are placed in high and responsible situations, that we may counteract the common tendency of the human mind to lower all that is great, and to detract from all that is above us, and that we may obey the apostolical injunction "not to speak evil of dignities." But if it be intended, as we fear it too often is, to encourage the belief that the UNERRING JUDGE will make these allowances, that God himself will admit of any such distinction; that the man who has been clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day, will be at the last amenable to one

code, and the beggar who has lain at his gate will be tried by another; we must beseech you to discard from you for ever so dangerous, so unscriptural a delusion. There is not the smallest hint of such a doctrine throughout the whole range of the word of God. The danger and the difficulties, the burden and the temptations of wealth, are indeed, largely and freely dwelt upon; but where shall we find its immunities? In the vain phraseology of human society, in the opinion of the world, who possess, or are striving to possess it, but not in the word of God! These are all equally dealt with now, as all shall be hereafter; "God is no respecter of persons;" He does not enlarge the strait gate, or widen the narrow way to admit the wealthiest or the proudest of the sons of earth: the emperor and the beggar must resort to the same "fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness," and shed the same bitter tears of penitence, and live the same life of holy self-denial, or they will not meet at last in the same gracious presence, or rejoice together throughout the same blissful eternity. Let me then entreat you, to whom I am now more especially addressing myself, not to shelter yourselves behind such transparent sophistries, as the allowances which the opinion of the world chooses to make for the sins of the wealthy and the great. The eye of God, and the voice of God, will reach you behind so thin a screen, as they did our first parents when hidden among the trees of the garden; and such excuses will only increase the danger and condemnation of those who trust in them.

It is at the present time, more than it has ever been in our memories, essential that you, my brethren of the higher classes, should hear the truth plainly and unequivocally stated; and they only are your true friends who will unhesitatingly reveal it to you. While I endeavour, however imperfectly, to do so, believe me that I do it with feelings of the most sincere reluctance, lest my motives should be misapprehended. I should regret the results to which I point, as deeply and as bitterly as yourselves; but I believe that these results are more likely, under

Providence, to be prevented by a bold and honest warning, than by a timid and time-serving suppression of them.

It has been said, that if truth were driven from the dwellings of men, it ought to be found in the hearts of kings. May it not be said with equal propriety, that if a plain and fearless mode of speaking be banished from every other place, it ought to take refuge in the pulpit? If we, the ministers of God, be content to speak unto you smooth things, to prophesy deceit, where shall you seek a monitor who will venture to deal plainly with you?

The times in which our lot has been cast are not common times; they are times when knowledge and civilization have travelled down to the extremest limits of human society; when the lower classes, in intelligence and even in education, are following closely upon the footsteps of their superiors, and, as one of the evils necessarily attendant upon this new order of things, erroneously imagine themselves qualified to judge of the character and conduct of those above them. The natural consequence of this is, that the day when imposing titles and high-sounding names could awe the multitude into obedience, and frown the observers into respect, is paasing rapidly away for ever. Old customs and institutions cease to be venerated because they are old, and rank ceases to be respected because it is powerful. The sentiments of men are undergoing a visible and most fearful change; every thing is now brought to the bar of public opinion—a tribunal which while it boasts of emancipating itself from the fetters of ancient prejudice, has neither sought nor desired to seek the more hallowed influences of restraining grace—while they who sit in judgment there, are no longer the lettered or the titled few who for centuries had esteemed it their own prescriptive privilege, but the thousands and tens of thousands by whom the lower departments of life are crowded.

Is it not then evident, (for my desire is not to dwell upon the general question, but its personal application,) that you also, if you are anxious to retain your stations in the respect and

sympathies of society, must advance with the times? You must produce, in addition to those claims which you now possess, and which to every well-thinking mind will always be respectable, a far more availing title to the love and veneration of your inferiors. You must take your stand upon the strong ground of our common Christianity. You must show, by your respect for the name, and the ordinances, and the word, and the Sabbath of our God, that you esteem the title of a child of God your highest rank, a holy obedience to the will of God your most imperative duty, and the favour of God your greatest privilege. You must evidence, by your regard for the best interests of your poorer brethren, for their spiritual as well as temporal improvement, by your sympathy in their sorrows, by your ready and liberal kindness to their necessities, that you are not ashamed to acknowledge the near and intimate relationship which subsists between you; that you indeed love the same Saviour, and for his sake are anxious to do them good.

Such a change, blessed be God, is unquestionably making its way through the middling and higher ranks of society. God grant that it may be sufficiently rapid in its progress, and extensive in its operation, to avert, under Divine Providence, those events which it requires no prophetic vision to discern upon the wings of the coming times. Over this we have no control; but it is our duty, as ministers, to express our solemn convictions upon so important a topic, and it is no less your duty than your interest, as hearers, to pray to the Spirit of God to carry the application of them to your own hearts; that you may each for yourselves learn experimentally the comfort of this great Bible truth—that, whether in the darkest hour of public danger, when the judgments of God are abroad in the earth, or in the most trying moments of personal or family affliction, there is but one unfailing source of strength and consolation, but one refuge from the storm, one covert from the blast, one shelter from the tempest: in the words of the wise man, “The name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous runneth into it and are safe.”

LECTURE IV.

GENESIS XIII. 8.

“And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen, for we be brethren.”

THE points of interest which we have hitherto considered in the history of Abram, have been those chiefly which regarded his belief in, his dependence upon, and his obedience to his God. The incident which we are now approaching is one which will present the patriarch to us in the details of domestic life, in the common transactions between man and man ; where we shall have the opportunity of observing whether his daily conduct and temper were in unison with that high character for spiritual attainments with which the writers of inspiration have invested him. Happy would it be for the Christian world, if its professors of all ranks and in all ages could bear the scrutiny so safely, and come forth from the investigation so unimpeachably, as the father of the faithful.

Abram had, as we have seen, returned from Egypt into Canaan with all his family, and accompanied by Lot, his nephew. Both Abram and Lot had now become extremely rich ; their flocks and herds covered the face of the country, and their servants, born in their house and dwelling in their tents, formed of themselves no inconsiderable multitude.

Such wealth could scarcely be expected to exist long in any family without producing its usual results, dissension and division between those who fear not God, and trial and disunion even between those who are the most closely allied to him. We are accordingly informed, “that the land was not able to bear them that they might dwell together ; for their substance was great, so that they could not dwell together. And there was a strife between the herdmen of Abram’s cattle, and the herdmen of Lot’s cattle.”

It does not appear that the strife had reached to the heads of the respective families, but it had commenced with the domesticities: and instances have not been wanting in latter times, when feuds thus begun have kindled, not only individuals and families, but even clans and nations into war.

It was then that the practical nature of Abram's religion began to be developed. That we may place it in the strongest light, let us for a moment consider the manner in which a man of the world would have acted upon such an emergency, and then mark the gratifying and instructive contrast. Would he not have argued thus?—There can be no question that if the land will not maintain our whole company, it will at least maintain me, and all that belong to me; let therefore my nephew seek for himself, what I have already found, and what has been in so peculiar a manner promised to me. I have both the right to claim, and the power to maintain that right, and though I would willingly do every thing that is equitable and kind, it cannot be expected that the elder should yield to the younger, or that I should undervalue the promises or gifts of God, by being so unnecessarily ready to transfer them to another. If strife or hostility be endangered, the peril be to him who awakens it; I have wherewithal to defend myself, and to punish my opponents.—Such would have been unquestionably the opinion of nine-tenths of mankind, and so prevalent is this selfish mode of reasoning and acting in the world around us, that we scarcely feel that there would have been any thing for the worldly man to animadvert upon, had this been the language and conduct of the patriarch himself. Let us then hasten to contrast this with what were indeed his language and conduct upon this important occasion; “Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen, for we be brethren.” Of how widely different a spirit from those to whom we have alluded, must he have been possessed, who could thus speak upon a subject of considerable aggravation: “Let there be no strife, for *we be brethren*.” When we look around us in the

world, who would believe that the same relationship, and therefore the same blessed motive for peace, still exists among its inhabitants? When we see the quarrels and the coldnesses, the lawsuits and the strifes, between those who are not only bound by the common tie of Christian fraternity, but by the closest and most indissoluble bonds of affinity and blood, are we not tempted to inquire, can these men indeed be “brethren?” Can they be all trusting to the same hope of salvation, and expecting, or even desiring, to dwell together in the same heaven? It is impossible: with such divisions of heart and affections, with such bitterness of feeling and expression, the same eternal mansions could not contain them: the very tranquillity of heaven itself would be broken up if they were admitted there; heaven would be no heaven, if it were a place where so many differing brethren, of so many differing families, were all to congregate together in one eternal abode.

But the kindness of Abram did not exhaust itself in a courteous speech, or evaporate in mere expressions: he thus proceeds with almost unexampled tenderness and humility to address his younger and far less amiable kinsman, “Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me; if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or, if thou depart to the right, then I will go to the left.” What forbearance, what generosity, what true nobility of mind was here! Abram, standing on the confines of a country far exceeding in fertility that through which they were passing, does not for a moment regard the difference, or claim, as he might have done, from the expressed promise of the Almighty, the whole for himself: he does not, as all must allow he would have been most fully justified in doing, even claim for himself the priority of choice; he waives every right, and gives up every pretension, in favour of one far younger, and less deserving, humbly contenting himself with the portion which Lot should leave him. Well did our Lord declare, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.” And yet, alas! how little of this spirit is there upon earth! To

give up a single point, to yield upon a single question, although you know yourself to be in the wrong, is, in the opinion of the world, rather a mark of pusillanimity and weakness, than of common honesty and candour; while even among sincere Christians such a concession is considered as no slight triumph of principle: but to yield when you are confessedly in the right, to give up your claim, when justice, reason, equity, and the power to maintain it are all upon your side, this is so rare as to be rather matter of tradition than such things have been, than among the every-day occurrences of the Christian's life that such things are. Yet how completely was this the principle upon which Abram acted, and which the God of Abraham commends!

My brethren, would you desire—and who is there that would not desire—to emulate so lovely a character? There is only one method in which it can be achieved; there is only one principle from which an habitual consistency in all the amiable qualifications of life can flow: “Let that *mind* be in you, which was in Christ Jesus;” “Let the *love of Christ constrain you.*” The sweetest natural disposition may be soured by disappointments or impaired by unkindness, or expire amid the pains and disquietudes of sickness, or the peevishness and fretfulness of age; but the forbearance, the affectionate and feeling regard for others, the ready postponement of our own interest or wishes to theirs, which flow not from the mere blessing of a naturally even temper, or the comforts of a well-organized body, or a well-balanced mind, but from a heart renewed by the Spirit of God, from a mind deeply imbued with the love of Christ, from an habitual imitation of his blessed and perfect example, will never fail you.

We do not mean to say that the most sincere Christian may not be betrayed into momentary harshness, or hastiness of expression, that you will never utter an uncharitable word, or be guilty of an unkind action; but we do mean to assert, that these will be exceptions, the few and rare exceptions, while with the living principle of the Spirit of Christ within,

and the beauteous model of his perfect character without, you will never habitually and designedly err on the side of selfishness, unkindness, or uncharitableness.

Strive then, my Christian brethren, as far as in you lies, to take away the reproach which has been unjustly cast upon the Christian name and profession by the worldliness, the injustice, the rapacity or the cruelty of some of its professing followers. Who can tell how deeply, even in his own person, the cause of Christianity may have suffered from the existence of feelings such as these? Is it not grievous to reflect, that at the last day there may be many of those who shall be cast into outer darkness, to whom we may ourselves have given cause to make this most true but unavailing complaint: 'There was a time when I was seriously disposed to have inquired into those doctrines which the religious people of my day professed; but when I sought their more intimate acquaintance, for the purpose of learning their opinions, and examining their practice, I found them so widely at variance, so much of love in their creed, and of hatred in their lives, of harshness and uncharitableness towards others, of differences and divisions among themselves, that I shrunk from a closer connexion with them, and remain in that ignorance and disobedience which will now receive their justly-merited reward, and condemn me to the blackness of darkness for ever.

Earnestly then let me exhort you, each within the circle of his own little influence, to present to the eyes of the world the Christian character in all its spiritual harmony and beauty: "Put on as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering: forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any; even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye;" showing forth in your life and conversation the "fruits of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." Demonstrate that you are indeed the children of Abram, by evincing the same peaceableness and self-denial, the same kindness and urbanity

in the every-day transactions of common life ; “ doing to all men as you would they should do unto you ;” and in lowliness of mind esteeming others better than yourselves. Carry the spirit of your divine Master, the conformity to the revealed will and character of your God, not merely into his temple with you, but into your occupations and your retirements ; into your counting-houses, and your dwelling-houses ; into the duties of every day, and the domestic intercourse of every hour : these are the tests, the only true and genuine tests, of your religious profession ; for be assured that “ he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, cannot love God whom he hath not seen.” “ God is love ; and he that dwelleth in *love*, dwelleth in God, and God in him.”

No sooner had Abram made to his nephew the kind and liberal proposition upon which we have been speaking, than we are informed that Lot immediately accepted the offer of priority of choice ; and without a single feeling either of that gratitude which might have led him to return the offer to his uncle, or that delicacy which might have taught him to content himself with the inferior portion of the territory around them, grasped at once at the proffered kindness, and “ chose for himself all the plain of Jordan,” the best watered and most fertile portion of the land.

With the history of Lot, with his ingratitude, his selfishness, his covetousness, if these were at this time features in the character of him, who was afterwards spoken of as a sincere and upright man of God, we are not concerned ; but as the nephew of Abram, as one for whom we shall find the patriarch hereafter most mercifully and successfully interesting himself, it may not be irrelevant to remark, that this was the first false step which led to a life of the most trying and harassing vicissitudes. Lot now separated from the company of a man of God, from the benefit of his ordinances and his altars, his precepts and his example ; and for the sake of earthly abundance, voluntarily betook himself into the neighborhood, and finally into

the closest companionship and intimacy, of those who knew not the Lord.

My younger brethren : you whose happiness it is, in whatever station of life you are, to be placed at present within the instructions and the privileges of a religious family, think gratefully of this blessing, and reflect seriously before you consent to forego or separate from it. Be assured that the very society of God's people is no common blessing, and their ordinances and altars no common privilege.

If the providence of God have placed you in the lower ranks of life, and I would here especially address myself to domestic servants, be very careful how you permit any prospect of superior temporal advantages to induce you to relinquish the benefits of living in a family conducted upon truly Christian principles. If you are freely permitted to attend divine worship, and, as far as your necessary occupations will admit, to hallow this sacred day ; if you have the comfort and the benefit of family prayers, and if these Christian advantages be duly appreciated and improved by you, you may be convinced that the blessing of God may rest upon you in an especial manner, while beneath that roof. Be not therefore in haste, for any imaginary advantages, to leave it. While you evince your thankfulness to God for placing you there, show also, by practising all good fidelity, by the strictest honesty and most respectful obedience, your gratitude to your employers. As John the Baptist said to the soldiers, " Be content with your wages," and " meddle not with them who are given to *change*." You may, and doubtless will, find some difficulties and privations in every situation,—so would Lot, had he continued with Abram,—but infinitely less distressing and more endurable than those which succeeded his separation. Take warning then by his example, and let it be no trivial advantage in the future, no slight trial and inconvenience in the present, which shall tempt you to forsake a family in which you are treated as if you possessed an immortal soul, and were preparing for an eternal inheritance.

It must have been a most sincere and heartfelt grief to the aged patriarch, to view his young relation thus readily withdrawing from the tents of his uncle, and to find himself deprived of the company and society of one whom he had brought from a land of idolatry, and taught to acknowledge and worship the great Jehovah. This, then, was the period selected by the Almighty to renew in a peculiar manner his promises to Abram. "The Lord said unto Abram, *after that Lot was separated from him*, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art, northward and southward and eastward and westward ; for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever."

How striking an instance is this of the considerate kindness and tender mercies of Him with whom we have to do ! At the moment when Abram had been making the greatest sacrifices for peace, at the time when he was most remarkably demonstrating how loosely he sat by the richest earthly abundance, compared with the desire of approving himself to God, the Almighty visits him with a fresh manifestation of his presence, and comforts him with renewed assurances of his future inheritance. And does not the experience of the Christian still evidence to the same compassionate dealing on the part of his Almighty Father ? If you, my Christian brethren, are ever led to acts of painful self-denial ; if, for the sake of peace, for the honour of God or the glory of his name, you ever willingly forego any worldly advantage, or deprive yourself of any temporal gratification, how sweetly are you recompensed, how amply are you repaid, even at the present hour, by the increased enjoyment of closer and more intimate communion with your Redeemer, and by a sense of his approving presence and his all-seeing eye ! How completely does He thus accomplish his own most gracious declaration, " There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake or the gospel's, but he shall receive an hundred-fold *now* in this present time, and in the world to come eternal life."

Thus also, when those whom you have loved and cherished here, in whose society you have delighted, with whom you have enjoyed the comforts of this world, or the far more blissful anticipations of that which is to come, when they are separated from you by unavoidable distance, or removed from you by the hand of death, how cheering to the eye of faith is the bright, unfading prospect of the future inheritance! At such times, how powerfully and how soothingly does the Spirit of God speak to the mind of the believer! and, when the soul is faint and the heart is heavy, say to you as he did of old to Abram, “Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art;” cease to dwell upon your present disquietudes and losses; cease to “sorrow as men without hope;” “look *from* the place” where sin has tainted every comfort, and sorrow has darkened every prospect, and let the eye of faith cast its bright glance of hope and joy to the inheritance which is prepared for you. “For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it;” as surely is it for *thee* if thou art an obedient believer in the Lord Jesus, as if purchased for *thee alone*; as certainly shall it be kept for thee, and thou for it, as if *thine* absence alone would mar the happiness of its ten thousand times ten thousand happy inmates.

In the darkest hour, therefore, of this world’s most trying vicissitudes, dwell with humble hope upon the prospects of this blessed, this glorious inheritance; it is indeed an enlivening and an elevating theme, one which, more than any other, tends to comfort the heart when broken, and to cheer the spirit when sorrowful. Consider those who are already there, who have all passed through the same trials, been subject to the same infirmities, and bowed beneath the same sorrows as yourself. The thoughts of that glorious inheritance, of “the recompense of the reward;” of Him, whom having not seen, they loved, and with whom they longed to be for ever dwelling; of that blissful country where Jesus reigns, and where sin and sorrow, and death and trial, are alike unknown—were the thoughts which gladdened their hearts and dried their tears while engaged

in the same pilgrimage as yourselves. Let them also be the thoughts to cheer your labours and silence your regrets. Survey the "land in the length of it and in the breadth of it;" for if you are indeed a believing and obeying servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, although the poorest, the lowest, and the most undeserving, to thee will God assuredly give it. Reflect how immediate the hour of your actual possession of this rich inheritance may be—how near it must be; and may "the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing;" with all comfort and consolation now in the prospect, and with all certainty of happiness hereafter in the fruition, of that blissful country in which those "who die in the Lord shall rest from their labours," and rejoice in his immediate presence from everlasting to everlasting.

LECTURE V.

GENESIS XIV. 18.

"And Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought forth bread and wine; and he was the priest of the most high God: and he blessed him."

THE next incident in which we find Abram engaged, differs remarkably from all that have preceded it. The patriarch was pre-eminently a man of peace, willing, as we have seen, to sacrifice every worldly advantage, rather than interrupt that harmony which he knew to be so essential to the honour of his religious profession, and so entirely in accordance with the will of his God. On the present occasion, however, we find him assuming the character of the warrior, placing himself at the head of a numerous body of his servants, and waging a short but successful conflict with the princes of the warlike tribes, among whom he sojourned.

We are informed by the inspired historian, that four of the neighbouring princes had made an inroad upon the cities of the

plain, in one of which, even in the accursed Sodom, Lot, the nephew of Abram, had now taken up his permanent abode; and having conquered the kings of those cities, they carried away as captives Lot and his family, and all his goods. We may just remark in passing, how speedily the evil fruits of Lot's separation from Abram became apparent: he left this man of God, fearful lest his wealth should be diminished by the want of an abundant pasturage; and the very next mention that is made of him is, that he has lost everything which he so highly valued and so dearly purchased, and is himself an exile and a prisoner.

"Be sure your sin will find you out," was as completely verified in the history of Lot, as in that of Jacob. The original act of duplicity in the latter was, as we observed while pursuing his history, returned upon him by the duplicity of others in almost every important incident and every near relationship of life. The original act of covetousness in the former seems to have been equally visited upon Lot throughout the whole of his eventful and disastrous career: every trial appearing to be so appointed by the hand of God, as to touch him in this most tender point, until in the last stages of his career, from the possession of flocks and herds, so that the land was not able to bear him, we find him a poverty-stricken outcast, far from the fertile plains which had been so much the object of his ambition, closing his days in a cavern of the mountains. May we never be tempted to forget, my brethren, that the word of God has declared that "they who hasten to be rich fall into temptation and a snare," for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth, but in that blessed state of mind which teaches us to "seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness," content with the smallest portion, and the narrowest prospects here on earth, if we be but "rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom."

No sooner, however, was the calamity in which Lot was involved communicated to Abram, than we read that "he armed his trained servants born in his own house, three hun-

dred and eighteen, and pursued them unto Dan. And he divided himself against them, he and his servants, by night, and smote them, and pursued them unto Hobab, which is on the left hand of Damascus. And he brought back all the goods, and also brought again his brother Lot and his goods, and the women also and the people." This is the only instance recorded throughout the life of Abram, of his engaging in any warlike expedition. Much as we dislike the name of war, and utterly unchristian and unjustifiable as we consider every species of *offensive* warfare, we cannot withhold our approbation of this truly disinterested action of the patriarch. To succour the weak, to relieve the distressed, to liberate the captive, were his only motives, and the comfort of an approving conscience his only reward; for we find that after having been blessed with the most signal success, the use of which he delighted to make of the fruits of his victory, was to restore all that had been taken to their rightful owners.

It was while Abram was returning from this successful enterprise, that his interview with one of the most remarkable characters in holy writ, took place. A character shrouded in the deepest mystery, and of whom the little we can learn is to be obtained rather by "comparing spiritual things with spiritual," and by throwing the light of other portions of the word of God upon the obscurity of this dark passage, than by any thing which is contained in the passage itself. The personage to whom I allude is Melchizedek, and all that is here narrated of him is as follows:—"And Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God. And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth. And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thine hand. And he (*i. e.* Abram) gave him tithes of all."

No further mention throughout the history of Abram is ever made of this remarkable person; but the next time we hear of him is in a place and in a manner which tend extremely to

exalt him in our view, and to give him a pre-eminence over many other characters in holy writ, of whom far more has been recorded. It is in the 110th Psalm, that Psalm which is dedicated to the prophetic declaration of the future glories of the Messiah, that the next mention is made of this extraordinary person : we are there informed, “ The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.” While the apostle to the Hebrews, to leave us no possibility of doubting of whom the psalmist spake, expressly says, “ Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.”

It is not the intention of these plain and familiar lectures, to enter either into the mazes of controversy, or into the depths of critical inquiry ; I shall not, therefore, occupy your time by stating the various conjectures—and widely varying they are—to which the mysterious account of Melchizedek in holy writ has given rise. There is, however, one which, as it is favoured by some of our best commentators, it may be desirable to notice, viz. : that Melchizedek was a personal manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ, and was himself the uncreated angel of the covenant. This is grounded upon that declaration of the apostle, in the 7th chapter to the Hebrews, which says that Melchizedek was “ without father and without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days nor end of life.” There can be no doubt that these expressions are strictly applicable to none but our blessed Redeemer ; they are, however, as we shall see, in a modified sense, applicable to the person of whom they were predicated, and whom, notwithstanding this remarkable description, we believe to have been a mere mortal, fashioned in all points like as we are. Indeed it scarcely appears possible that Melchizedek could have been the Messiah in person, for the same apostle hath said of him, that “ he was *made like* unto the Son of God,” an expression of itself sufficient to show that he was not really the Son of God. We should therefore incline to think that the account given of him by Josephus is the true one, viz., that Melchizedek was a

Canaanitish prince, a pious and religious man, eminently raised up by God, and whose genealogy was kept a secret, that he might be in this, as in other things, a type of Christ.

It is for this purpose alone that he appears to have been introduced into the page of Scripture history ; in all that is told of him, and in all that is left untold of him, he is equally a most remarkable type of our ever-blessed Lord ; and we should therefore scarcely be justified if we were not to dwell awhile upon these points of resemblance which the apostle to the Hebrews has so plainly recorded. "This Melchizedek," says the apostle, "was king of Salem." It is sometimes thought that the Salem of which Melchizedek was king, was in after days the city of Jerusalem, which is called Salem in the 76th Psalm ; but this is improbable, for the spot where the interview between Abram and Melchizedek took place, was between Damascus and Sodom, while Jerusalem was nearly forty miles distant, and in a contrary direction ; there is little doubt, therefore, that this Salem was the Salem of the New Testament, "near to which John was baptizing," which was precisely in the situation I have described, and in which, according to Jerome, very magnificent ruins were shown in his day as the palace of Melchizedek.

The apostle, speaking of his name, says that he was called Melchizedek, which is literally Melchi Zedek, the righteous king, or the king of righteousness : speaking of his title, the same apostle says, that "he was king of Salem," or king of peace, which is the literal meaning of Salem. In both his name, therefore, and his title, he was eminently a type of the Lord Jesus, of whom we are told by the prophet Jeremiah, "A king shall reign and prosper, and this is his name whereby he shall be called, 'The Lord our righteousness :'" and by the prophet Isaiah, "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and his name shall be called the Prince of Peace."

Again, as in his name and titles, so in his offices, was Melchizedek remarkably a type of our Lord. We are told by the apostle, that he was not only king of Salem, "but a priest

of the most high God,"—offices in the earlier times not unfrequently united—and by this union he typified the kingly and priestly offices of our blessed Redeemer, of whom the Almighty declared, "I have set my king upon my holy hill of Zion;" and again, "He is a merciful and faithful high priest," says the apostle, "a great high priest passed into the heavens."

It is important that we should never lose sight of this remarkable union of the kingly and priestly offices in the person of our ever-blessed Redeemer, so plainly portrayed in the types, and set forth in the prophecies, of the Old Testament, and so remarkably demonstrated in the New. But be not content with the mere scriptural knowledge that the Lord Jesus Christ is indeed both priest and king: learn rightly to estimate the practical value of such an acknowledgment; carry the inquiry to your own heart, and often ask yourself, Is the Lord Jesus Christ thus united in both these important offices to *me*? Have I received Him as my Priest to atone for me, and my King to govern me? Unless both sceptres are freely offered Him, He will not accept the proffered sovereignty. Where as a priest he has reconciled you to God, there as a king must he rule in your daily walk and conversation: where he has been received as a "king of righteousness,"—bestowing an imputed righteousness which shall satisfy God, and vouchsafing a sanctifying righteousness by which you shall glorify God—there, and there only, will He come as "King of Peace," with healing on his wings, pardoning, comforting, blessing, "keeping him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed upon God."

Proceed we still further to examine those points in which Melchizedek was a type of our Lord in what was *not* revealed of him, as we have seen him to be in that which was made manifest.

The apostle declares that Melchizedek "was without father, without mother, without descent," *i. e.* the Holy Spirit purposely concealed his parentage, to make him a more perfect type of the eternal Son of God, than he could have been by any other method. For as Melchizedek was "without father,"

so also was our Lord in his human nature, being born of a pure virgin; as Melchizedek was "without mother," so was our Lord in his divine nature, being the Son of God by an eternal generation; as Melchizedek was "without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life," *i. e.* in other words, neither his birth nor his death having been recorded, so did the prophet Micah expressly say of our Lord, "his goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." He was thus literally, what Melchizedek was only apparently, "without descent," "for He was in the beginning," and from everlasting, before time was created, and He shall be "to everlasting," when time shall be no more. "Who then," as the prophet asks, "shall declare his generation?" Melchizedek's descent *was* not declared, only that he might be the more perfect type of Him whose descent *could* not be declared.

But let us turn from the name, and the titles, and the offices, and the genealogy, of Melchizedek, to his employments, and we shall find him still presenting the same striking and beautiful type of the *true* "king of righteousness" and "king of peace."

In the short passage in which Melchizedek is presented to us, we read that he was engaged in three remarkable occupations. He received tithes of all that Abram possessed; he brought forth bread and wine for the refreshment of the patriarch and of his weary followers; and, in a very solemn and peculiar manner, he bestowed his blessing upon the father of the faithful.

Leaving the consideration of Melchizedek receiving the tithes of Abram, the object of which is most fully discussed by St. Paul in the seventh chapter of his epistle to the Hebrews, let us rather pass on to the two remaining actions of this remarkable personage, in the hope and with the prayer that we may derive something of personal benefit and consolation by looking through the type to that blessed Being who is the great and glorious antitype.

We are told in the words of the text, that when Abram was returning from the slaughter of the kings, Melchizedek, as a

king, met him, and brought forth bread and wine to refresh and sustain him after the toils of the conflict. Now turn we to the illustrious antitype, our Lord and our Redeemer, and behold Him, as a gracious and all-powerful king, employed in the same merciful act of condescension and kindness to his weary followers. When you, my Christian brethren,—I would address myself to the experience of the Christian's heart,—during the toils of your pilgrimage, the conflicts of your warfare, are like the soldiers of Gideon, "faint yet pursuing;" when you feel almost sinking beneath the repeated assaults of your spiritual enemies, and, although you may have successfully repelled them, are still trembling lest you should fall before their renewed attack, how mercifully does your King, like Melchizedek of old, bring forth his bread and wine; the bread of his supporting and strengthening word, the wine of his heart-elevating promises, to cheer and recruit your drooping spirits! Were it not for his blessed aid, how often ere this would you have sunk, wearied and exhausted, in the unequal conflict; how often would even the moment of victory, the most dangerous moment to the Christian, have been the moment of fatal and irremediable defeat; when the powers of darkness having been vanquished, the temptation successfully opposed, the evil spirit of self-complacency comes hovering upon the track of the retreating foe, and you, who had so lately triumphed, would, but for the aid of your all-merciful Sovereign, have sunk prostrate at the feet of the enemy.

Lastly: did Melchizedek not only as a king sustain and cheer the returning patriarch, but also as a priest, in the most solemn manner, bestow upon him his blessing? Behold again the gracious antitype, our Lord and our Redeemer, in the last scene of his mortal life, a life of suffering love, when, as a priest, He was about to "enter in within the veil," "leading out his disciples from the holy city, and lifting up his hands and blessing them, and while he was blessing them, he was parted from them and carried up into heaven." How delightful is the thought to every humble follower of our adorable

Redeemer, that the last time the Saviour, in ken of flesh, was ever looked upon by mortal eye, the last time He mingled in matchless condescension with the church militant here on earth, He was thus graciously, thus mercifully, thus compassionately engaged in fulfilling his priestly office, in blessing his poor, forlorn, and helpless followers ! How encouraging is the belief, that at the present day, and at the present hour, this is, and while time remains this shall be still, his merciful occupation, that as a great High Priest he has entered into the holy of holies to plead for his people ; for “ He ever liveth to make intercession for us,” ever liveth to bless with the tokens of his love, with the communications of his grace, each individual member of his redeemed and ransomed family. Nor is this all. It was not enough that his last act on earth should be an act of blessing, his present occupation still the same, but when he comes again, it shall be for the same most gracious purpose !

How glorious is the anticipation, that when time shall be no longer, when we shall see Him “ whom having not seen we love,” the first accents of his voice, upon the day of his long looked for, prayed for, wished for return, when he shall come surrounded by the church triumphant, will still be the language of blessing ! He shall come forth to bless his people, saying to each and to all who have denied themselves and taken up his cross, and in heart and affection, and life and conversation, followed him, “ Well done, good and faithful servants, enter into the joy of your Lord.”

LECTURE VI.

GENESIS XV. 6.

“ He believed in the Lord ; and he counted it to him for righteousness.”

WE concluded our last discourse with the consideration of Abram’s interview with Melchizedek, upon the former’s return

from his successful expedition against the four kings. There was yet another, and almost equally remarkable interview, which occurred at the same time and place. "The king of Sodom," who had suffered so severely from the inroad of the four kings, whom Abram had vanquished, "went out to meet him," and said unto him, Give me the persons, and take the goods to thyself." In other words, restore to me my subjects, who have been carried away captive, and whom you have liberated, and keep as a recompense, the flocks, and the herds, and the goods, which are justly the property of the conqueror. And Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have lift up my hand unto the Lord," (*i. e.* I have sworn,) "that I will not take from a thread even to a shoe-latchet, and that I will not take any thing that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich." What another beautiful testimony is here given to the disinterestedness of the patriarch? He would receive no reward at the hands of the ungoldly king of an abandoned and God-deserted city. But for the men that were with him, the three princes who had joined him in the conflict and the pursuit, "Let them," said Abram, "take their portion." They probably were not the followers of the God of Abram, and over them he desired to exercise no control; but for himself, he was firm and decided that nothing of the goods of Sodom should cleave to him. He looked for his support and his subsistence here, to the Lord, and to him alone; he knew that "his bread and his water should be sure." God had undertaken to provide for him—the Lord had provided, the Lord would provide—and Abram had learnt to trust the word of God's promises, even where he could not trace the hand of his providence.

My brethren, would that we were able to say that the spiritual children of Abram acted at the present day in accordance with this admirable example. But is it not, on the contrary, continually brought as a charge against the professing Christians of our times, that instead of evidencing this unworldly and generous spirit, there are few who are more anxious to secure every possible temporal advantage than themselves; few who

are more eagle-eyed after the emoluments of this world, or more inclined, I will not say to overstep the bounds of the strictest honesty, in the acquirement of them, but to advance to the very limits of those boundaries. You, my brethren, who thus act, plainly demonstrate, that while you profess to trust God for the eternal salvation of your soul, that jewel of inestimable value, you cannot really trust him for the maintenance of the poor perishable casket which contains it.

Again, how often do we hear it said, that there is far more liberality, more openness of dealing, more disinterestedness among the high-minded people of the world, than among many of whom we may not doubt that they are the people of God. This is a distressing truth, but one which must not be suppressed. You excel the people of the world, my Christian brethren, upon every point which involves your duty to your heavenly Father, let it not be said that you do not equally excel them in your duties to your fellow-men : let it be evident, that the graces of the Christian are as superior to the virtues of the man of the world, in the every-day transactions of life, as the Christian's motive is superior to the worldling's motive, and the joys of the Christian's heaven are superior to the pleasures and immunities of earth. And especially you, my poorer brethren, when you are tempted to relieve your poverty by any act of petty dishonesty of your own, or by sharing in the doubtfully-acquired property of another ; or, if you fill the office of domestic servants, by what are termed in the language of the world, the perquisites of your station, but are, in the language of God, too often positive thefts ; remember the upright, disinterested example of him of whom we speak : be "jealous over yourselves with a godly jealousy," lest you should put it into the power of your spiritual enemy to say hereafter, as the king of Sodom would have said of Abram, **I HAVE MADE THIS MAN RICH !**

If you are a child of God, be assured you shall never want such a child's portion of the good things of this world, as a Father, who knows you infinitely better than you know your-

self, thinks best for your own interests, and for his glory : rest therefore in faith upon the promise, that the Lord hath provided, and the Lord will provide.

It was “after these things,” says the inspired historian, that “the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram : I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.” Abram in all probability felt, that although he had thus surprised his enemies, and been successful in this midnight encounter, there was no security against the future attack, and therefore, bold as he was, he “feared ;” his heart probably quailed within him at the thought that he was an unprotected stranger in a foreign land, that his vanquished foes might again return upon him, and that he might yet perish by the hand of his enemies. The fears which Abram felt on this occasion do not appear to have been expressed, but God knoweth the heart and all that is passing there, and therefore this was the moment that the Lord appeared to him,—“*after these things,*”—saying, “Fear not, Abram ; I am thy shield.”

How consolatory is it to the Christian to be thus assured that all the secret fears of his heart, as well as the outward afflictions of his lot, are equally known to God. “Let not your hearts be troubled,” was the merciful address of our Lord to his sorrowing though silent disciples. Every secret fear, therefore, my brethren, is known to Him “from whom no secrets are hid ;” and while you are trembling with anxiety lest you should still sink before your spiritual enemies ; like David, lest you should still “perish by the hand of Saul ;” your Redeemer declares to you there is no cause for alarm, for “I am thy shield.” However thickly the fiery darts of the wicked one may fall around thee, they shall not pierce thee while God is thy shield ; “a thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand ; but it shall not come nigh thee, for he shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou be safe ; his righteousness and truth shall be thy shield and buckler.”

It is thus, as the psalmist says, “our fathers trusted in God,

and were not confounded." It is thus when you, my brethren, forego any unworthy advantage, when you renounce any worldly gratification, when you refuse any forbidden or dishonest profits, for the sake of Christ, you "shall in no wise lose your reward;" the Lord himself will be "the portion of your inheritance and of your cup, He will maintain your lot," however the world may frown upon you and withhold its capricious favours, or separate from you and deny its transitory aggrandizements, remember that there is One who hath said, "I am thy *exceeding great reward*." Wanting his presence and his blessing in the richest earthly abundance, you are poor indeed; but possessing Him, enabled by his Spirit to say, "Christ is mine," and your habitation, though it be but a hovel, will be the abode of contentment and peace; your heart, though it be often grieved by sin and oppressed by outward misery, will be "the temple of the Holy Ghost," and your spirit meetening, by all which happens here below, for an inheritance beyond the skies.

As soon as the Almighty had thus revealed himself to Abram, we find the patriarch availing himself of the opportunity of this personal communication with the great Jehovah, to remind Him of his promise, and to urge upon Him its fulfilment. "And Abram said, Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing that I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus? And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed, and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir." We observe in this remonstrance of Abram, perhaps something of the infirmity of our fallen nature, but certainly joined to an earnest and praiseworthy desire after the promised blessing. He does not indeed appear to doubt that God would make of him a great nation, and that "in his seed, even in Christ, all nations of the earth should be blessed;" but time was passing on, eight years had already elapsed since the promise was first promulged, and yet no signs of its fulfilment. Abram therefore pleads with the Lord; as if he had said, 'Thou hast just declared thyself, "my exceeding great reward," and yet the promised seed is withheld,

and I go down the vale of years childless ; and to the eye of sense it appears as if my faithful servant Eliezer, born in my house, were to be my adopted heir, and I were to lose the glory of being, in a still more literal manner, the progenitor of the great Messiah.

Behold how mercifully the Almighty bears with the infirmities of his people ! He knew the heart of the patriarch, and therefore knew that his complaint was not the mere complaint of the natural man fearing to be written childless, but the earnest heart-felt longing of the spiritual man for a closer relationship to his Lord, a nearer affinity to that Saviour whom he had been already taught to believe in, to love, and to expect. Hesitate not my brethren, to express feelings such as these to a compassionate God. When you find that, notwithstanding all the promises and all the ordinances which He has mercifully bestowed upon you, you are still far less closely united to your Redeemer, your great and glorified Head, than you hoped, and prayed, and expected that ere this you should have been, it is a legitimate cause of complaint to the Most High ; tell your difficulties unto the Lord, deplore before Him your distance, the coldness of your affections, the deadness of your heart, the unprofitableness of your sacraments and your prayers. Say with Abram, " Lord, what wilt thou give me ? " what canst thou give me that can at all compensate for such a loss as this ? Remember thy promises which have been ever of old ; remember thy word upon which thou hast caused thy servant to hope ; remember Him who has purchased me with his blood, whose I am, and whom I desire to serve ; cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy Holy Spirit from me. If I am not " one with Christ, and Christ with me ; " if thou givest me not Christ, an interest in his blood, a hope of his salvation, a place in his kingdom, all that thou hast given or canst give, in comparison of what thou hast withheld, will be little worth.

God loves to be thus humbly but plainly reminded of his promises. He loves to see his children thus coveting, and " coveting earnestly the best gifts ; " for what would it profit

them if they were to gain the whole world, and yet lose their interest in the Lamb slain from its foundation? What will it profit you, if you abound to overflowing with this world's goods, and yet have not the blood of Christ sprinkled upon your conscience, his love and his Spirit within your heart? Abram's remonstrance entered into the ears of the Lord God of Sabaoth. For "behold the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, This (speaking of his servant Eliezer) shall not be thine heir, but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir." And having said this, the Lord led Abram to the door of his tent, and pointing to the apparently innumerable stars that were yet glittering in the firmament—for this manifestation of the Almighty was made before the dawn of day—"Look now towards heaven," said God, "and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them; and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be. And he believed in the Lord, and He counted it to him for righteousness."

It was thus that the Almighty listened to the anxious desire of his faithful servant, and again pledged himself more strongly than ever to the fulfilment of it; and it was thus that Abram was accepted before God by a simple reliance upon his promise, and obtained the name which has distinguished him in all ages of the world as "the father of the faithful." "He believed God," utterly improbable, considering his advanced age and the advanced age of Sarai his wife, as such a declaration must have appeared; he believed at once and unhesitatingly in the promises of the Lord, and God "counted it to him for righteousness." He believed that he should possess an innumerable progeny, that in his seed, *i. e.* Christ, as the apostle tells us, all nations of the earth should be blessed; he believed therefore in the Messiah who should come, and so believing, his faith was, as the homily expresses it, "the hand which put on Christ," and therefore instrumentally justified him before God.

My Christian brethren, it is of essential importance that you should understand the method by which Abram was thus

accounted righteous before God, not as a matter of mere historical research, or even of doctrinal inquiry, but as a matter of the deepest personal interest. The way of salvation has been one and the same from the creation of the world; "justification by faith only," is as evidently a doctrine of the Old Testament as it is a doctrine of the New, or an article of the Church of England. Our Lord himself tells us, "Abram rejoiced to see his day, and he saw it and was glad;" by which he can only mean that Abram rejoiced to foresee the coming of Christ Jesus our Lord in the flesh, a crucified and glorified Redeemer; and the unspeakably great and blessed consequences of it. It was thus that Abram and all the patriarchs and prophets and spiritual worshippers of God under the old dispensation, believed, with the fullest assurances of faith, on the person of the Messiah who should come, as every spiritual worshipper now believes on the Messiah who has come. The object of faith is in both cases the same,—and the effect of faith is in both cases the same—justification and peace, acceptance and holiness,—“Being justified by faith, we have peace with God,” and the faith by which we are justified being a living and an operative faith, daily evinces its fruits in “all holy conversation and godliness.”

Earnestly therefore would I beseech you to inquire of your own hearts, whether you have been led by the Spirit of God to receive this most important and deeply influential truth. How can I be accounted righteous before God? is the first great question of the awakened sinner's heart. Has it ever been—is it at this moment,—the inquiry of yours? If it be, the words of the text are the answer which God himself has given to it—Abram “believed in the Lord, and he counted it to him for righteousness.” Do you, according to the increased light and means of obtaining it in the dispensation under which you live, “believe in the Lord,” believe that his sinless sacrifice alone can atone for your sins, his righteousness satisfy God for your unrighteousness, his Spirit sanctify you from all uncleanness and infirmity, and lead you to glorify God in your

day and generation? So believing with a true, a living, an obeying faith, the object of your belief, the Lord Jesus Christ, will be made unto you “wisdom and righteousness, and sanctification and redemption;” so believing, you also will be justified before God; and “whom He justifies, them He also glorifies.” Therefore, as the apostle says, “there is now no condemnation”—there will be none hereafter—to you “who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”

LECTURE VII.

GENESIS XV. 17.

“And it came to pass, that when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces.”

WE considered, in the last discourse, the testimony borne by the Spirit of God to the faith of Abram, with respect to the promised seed, and to the Messiah who should spring from his loins. “He believed God, and He counted it to him for righteousness.”

There was yet, however, another subject upon which the faith of the patriarch was to be exercised, which had been already revealed to him by the Almighty, and which was now briefly but strikingly reiterated. This was the promise of the territory which his future progeny should inherit. The Lord said unto Abram, “I am the Lord that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it.”

It is worthy of observation, with what a beautiful propriety to the peculiar subject of the revelation, the Almighty always adapts the *name* under which he reveals himself. Thus, when about to deliver to the Israelites a law which was to bind them to Him as a people for ever, the Almighty marked his peculiar claims upon their gratitude and their obedience, by saying, “I

am the Lord, the God which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage:” leaving it to their own hearts to supply the addition, “Can we therefore refuse to obey Him who has broken every chain which held us in captivity, that He might bind us to himself in the bonds of love?” It was thus also that the Lord ushered in to Abram the improbable promise of the whole territory upon which he stood, by revealing himself to him as the God who had done greater things for him than this already, when He brought him out of the idolatrous land of his nativity.

And is it not in a similar manner, my brethren, and with the same beautiful propriety, that the Almighty continues to reveal himself to the heart of every one of his believing and obeying people? Does He not say to each of you, I am the Lord who redeemed thee, I am He who called thee when in ignorance and sin? “When I passed by thee,” (I quote the words of God by his prophet Ezekiel,) “and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee, Live;” and wilt thou cease to follow me, or can I ever cease to love, to guard, and to provide for thee? Surely there can be no promise of future protection so encouraging as the recollection of past mercies? What could establish Abram more fully in the hope that the land of Canaan should one day be his own, than the remembrance that he who promised it had already demonstrated his love, by calling him from the land of the Chaldees; and his power, by bringing him thus far in security and peace? What can establish you, my brethren, so fully in the hope of an inheritance in the heavenly Canaan, as the grateful recollection of all that your heavenly Father has done for you in the land of your nativity? When you remember for how many years you most probably lived in utter forgetfulness or ignorance of God, and yet during the whole of that period, were nurtured by his parental care; when you consider for how long a time you continued, perhaps in open defiance, or in secret neglect of God, and yet even then were sought and found by the influences of his good Spirit, and brought to some little degree of knowledge and love of

himself; when again you reflect how God has watched over you since you have received the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus, how He has preserved you from dangers, secured you in seasons of temptation, supported you in times of trial, cherished you in the days of sickness, comforted you in the hours of despondency; you cannot imagine that he will now desert you—you cannot believe that He will so mar the work of his own hands, the labour of his own love, as to cast you off for ever, and after bearing with you through all the toils of the journey, forsake you when drawing to your journey's end. O no, my beloved brethren! Learn to have more confidence in your God, more reliance upon Him who has said, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee;" more dependence upon Him who, while you were yet enemies, poured forth his blood upon the cross to reconcile you to God. There cannot have been such an expenditure of love for so small, so pitiful a return; nothing short of the eternal safety of your undying spirit can be a sufficient compensation for love so bountiful, so infinite.

No sooner had the Almighty repeated to Abram the promise which we have been considering, than we are told that the father of the faithful replied, "Lord God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?"

There is no reason to conclude from this, that Abram doubted that he should inherit the promised land; we are indeed assured that he fully believed in the Lord. But who is there among the sons of men whose faith is so perfect as to require no confirmation? Among the many real children of God who can say, I hope that I have an interest in the great atonement, I believe and trust that the Lord Jesus Christ is my Redeemer; how few are there, comparatively, who are enabled to declare, in the full assurance of faith with the appropriation of holy Job of old, "I know that my Redeemer liveth." Who is there, therefore, who may not with propriety adopt the prayer of the believing father in the Gospel, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."

It was doubtless upon this principle that we find the Almighty listening without displeasure to the requests both of Gideon and of Hezekiah, when they, although believing, required a sign in corroboration of their belief; and even blaming the unbelieving Ahaz for stubbornly refusing to ask a sign, when it was freely offered him by God himself.

In the present instance, therefore, the Almighty immediately acceded to the implied request of the patriarch, and commanded him, saying, “Take me an heifer of three years old, and a she-goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtle-dove and a young pigeon. And he took unto him all these, and divided them in the midst, and laid each piece one against another: but the birds divided he not.”

Thus was every thing placed in order for the sign which Abram had asked, and which the Almighty had readily promised. Still was Abram required to “tarry the Lord’s leisure.” From the early dawn to the closing eve, did he sit beside the sacrifice, but there was no voice nor any that answered; and yet he neither slumbered nor slept; neither suffered himself to repine, nor became careless or indifferent; so far from it, that we are told, “when the fowls came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away;” he would not suffer that which he was offering to the Lord, to be either diminished or defiled. Would, my brethren, that in all our religious duties, there were the same patient spirit of watchfulness, and the same untiring assiduity, the same unflagging zeal; that while engaged in the service of our God we were equally anxious to banish every wandering thought, to drive far away from us every worldly imagination—those unclean birds which come down upon our offerings, and sully, and taint, and disfigure every sacrifice which we would bring to the altar of the Lord.

At length the time arrived when Abram’s faithfulness and watchfulness having been sufficiently tried, the Lord redeemed his promise.

“When the sun was going down,” says the inspired historian, “a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and lo, a horror of great

darkness fell upon him." It was while in this supernatural ecstasy, that the Almighty delivered to him the following prophecy of the fate which awaited his descendants. "Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years." The middle clause of this sentence, "and shall serve them, and they shall afflict them," is to be considered parenthetical: for the actual servitude of the Israelites was only for a period of about eighty-six years, and we should therefore read it, "Know of a surety, that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, four hundred years." "And also," continues the prophecy, "that nation whom they serve, will I judge; and afterwards shall they come out with great substance." Here was a distinct and circumstantial prediction of the long sojourn of the seed of Abram in a strange country; of the bondage to which they should in after times be subjected in the land of Egypt; of the plagues with which the Almighty, when bringing forth his people with a high hand, and a stretched-out arm, should judge the Egyptians; and of "the jewels of silver, and jewels of gold," which should be presented to the Israelites by their terrified task-masters, by which they should spoil the Egyptians, and come forth from the house of their captivity "with great substance."

The only point of difficulty in the prediction, is the period of four hundred years, since we are told in the 12th chapter of Exodus, that "the sojourning of the children of Israel, who dwelt in Egypt, was four hundred and thirty years." To reconcile these apparently contradictory dates, it is only necessary to observe, that in the vision of which we are speaking, when the Almighty says, "Thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs four hundred years," the sojourning of the seed of Abram in a foreign land is dated from the time of the birth of Isaac, from which event, to the deliverance from Egypt, was exactly four hundred and five, or in round numbers, four hundred years. While in Exodus, the sojourning of the Israelites is dated from the arrival of Abram himself in Canaan,

which was twenty-five years earlier, and thus both these conflicting dates are perfectly reconcilable to the same event.

It is interesting to observe how completely we are enabled, by the light of inspiration, to trace the employments of Abram throughout the whole of the important day of the events of which we are speaking. It was in the early dawn of this day, that God led the patriarch to the door of the tent, before sunrise, and pointed out to him the innumerable stars shining in the firmament. It was in the succeeding part of the day, that the animals were killed and prepared as God had commanded : it was when the sun was going down, that a deep sleep fell upon Abram, in which he heard the prediction of which we have been speaking ; and again, it was when the sun went down, and it was dark, that the sign he had requested was vouchsafed.

What a day was this ! How do the constant intercourse and daily walking of the patriarchs with God, put to shame all our feeble and momentary communings with him ! We can hardly believe that ours is the same God, and that we are bound to Him by ties as close, and by relationship as endearing, as these holy men of old. Well may the hourly aspirations of our souls for ever be, " O for a closer walk with God ! "

But we must hasten on to the consideration of the sign which the Almighty had promised Abram, and which was no longer withheld. The following is the remarkable description given by the pen of inspiration ; " And it came to pass, that when the sun went down and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp passed between those pieces " of the creatures which Abram, at God's command, had killed and divided. You who are acquainted with the customs of the nations of antiquity, will see in this something more than a mere unmeaning sign ; you will recollect that the usual ceremonial in important national covenants, of which we have some very remarkable instances in ancient lore, was to divide an animal into two or more parts ; the persons covenanting passed between these parts ; intimating that should they break

the covenant, they should deserve to be cut asunder, and divided limb from limb, as the animal was, between whose mangled remains they were passing.

The smoking furnace which passed between the pieces is usually considered as an emblem of the dark furnace of trouble, affliction, and bondage, which the Israelites endured in Egypt, to which reference is so peculiarly made in the fourth chapter of Deuteronomy, where it is said, "The Lord hath brought you forth out of the iron furnace, even Egypt;" while the burning lamp which followed the smoking furnace, symbolized the shekinah, or glorious majesty of God, which should be with the Israelites in their great deliverance from the house of bondage, when in the words of the prophet, their salvation went forth "as a lamp that burneth." The Almighty thus, under the symbol of the smoking "furnace" and "burning lamp," passing between the pieces, not only gave to Abram the requested sign, but as we are told in the following verses, corroborated his promise, by thus making a covenant with Abram, that He, the Almighty, would not desert the progeny of Abram in their day of trial, but that he would accompany them in all their wanderings, and finally establish them in the promised land.

The land of Canaan therefore was given and solemnly made over; but the actual possession of it was withheld for four generations. The reason afforded by God for this postponement of the promised inheritance, is a very remarkable one. "In the fourth generation, they shall come hither again, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full." Although, therefore, the land of Canaan was, as we have seen, made over by solemn covenant to the seed of Abram, the justice of God would not consent to their taking possession, until the guilt of the present inhabitants should cry aloud for that punishment with which they were afterwards so fearfully visited. When this period should arrive, the Israelites were to enter in and take possession, "utterly to destroy all that they had, and to spare them not, but

to slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass."

Surely the effects of a sentence so fearfully severe, and yet so unquestionably just, could never have been intended to pass away with the guilty generation which it swept into perdition. Does it not cry with a warning voice at the present day, and at the present hour, to every nation under heaven? Does it not speak with a peculiar emphasis to ourselves, my brethren, as the inhabitants of a country which has most guiltily sinned, and yet for a long series of years most abundantly prospered? The iniquity of the Amorites was long, very long, nearly four hundred years in filling up, for that period elapsed before the Israelites came into possession, but fill it eventually did, and the moment it had so filled, the justice of God was manifested in their total extirpation. Turn not a deafened ear, or a hardened heart, I beseech you, to so solemn a warning. Are there no events passing around you to lead you to fear that the iniquity of our own nation may also be filling up? that our day of trial may be approaching? that the mercies so abundantly received, so little acknowledged, so long abused, may, as in the case of the Amorites, be cancelling our title-deeds, and preparing the way for the new possessors? and that yet a little while, and a perfectly just and a holy God will be compelled to say, "The iniquity of the people of England is now full?"

It is for you, my brethren, and for myself, under the divine grace and guidance, yet to endeavour to postpone that sentence; the sins of every nation must be made up of the sins of the individual members of that nation; every humble, holy, prayerful follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, and servant of our God, however low his rank, however small his means, however weak his attainments, is keeping back the day of solemn and certain visitation. I do not scruple to assert, because from my heart I believe it to be true, since all revelation teaches and all history confirms it, that the essentially Christian part of the community, the men and the women, and the children who

fear to offend God, and who love his commandments, who are found in his temples and at his altar in public, and upon their knees in private, are the salt which has kept, and is at this moment keeping—God only knows how long they will be permitted to keep us—from those trials which may be approaching. It is not the wisdom of our statesmen, it is not the courage of our soldiers, it is not whether one party or another hold the helm of government, which can preserve us from the day of visitation: it is instrumentally to be done by the prayers and the lives, and the devoted and consistent piety of the people of God.

You then who love your country, and who love your own little ones, who are entering upon life at a most awful period, think how powerful an additional motive you have here for an increase of faith, and holiness, and self-denial, and obedience. Our iniquity is not yet full, but remember that when the waters are at the brim, one drop will make them overflow. The eye of the Lord is even now upon this guilty country and upon its guilty inhabitants; the sword of the Lord is even now uplifted to strike; “offences must needs come, but wo to that man by whom the offence cometh:” wo to those who assist in filling up the rapidly rising measure. Be not content, in times like these, even with mere personal holiness: use your efforts with all over whom you possess the slightest control; urge them to a greater devotedness to God, and to a quiet, peaceable demeanour, to habits of order, and obedience to “the powers that be.” At such a time every one will be a faithful servant to his earthly king, who is a true believer in the King of kings. “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem;” be much in prayer, both in your families and in secret, that a God of wisdom may direct the councils of our rulers in the administration of the affairs of our country at this peculiarly trying and difficult crisis. The evil day may still be averted; the gathering tempest which even now darkens and lowers in the distance, may yet be dispersed; devotedness of heart, and soul, and life to God, will yet be accepted, prayer will yet be heard; the hand of the Lord, the

providence of the Lord, and the day of the Lord, may yet be more publicly acknowledged by us than they have been, and the glory of the Lord, instead of our own glory, may be made the more frequent subject of our boast.

But time is hastening on, the judgments of God are abroad, our condemnation slumbereth not; the smoking furnace, the symbol of national trial and national suffering, as in the vision of Abram, may be already kindled in our land: if it be, my Christian brethren, if no prayers, no efforts shall avail to postpone its approach, let us then only supplicate our God that the burning lamp may, as of old, accompany it; that the divine presence may not forsake his children; that "one like unto the Son of God" may be with us in the furnace, tempering its heat, shortening its duration, sanctifying its fires; that thus, as a nation and as individuals, we may come out of the furnace chastened, purified, but not consumed; our dross purged away, and every Christian grace and every holy affection shining more and more brightly to the glory of God our Saviour.

LECTURE VIII.

GENESIS XVIII. 1.

"And the Lord appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre."

AFTER the remarkable vision which formed the subject of the last discourse, we are informed by the inspired historian, that Sarai, Abram's wife, growing impatient for the long-postponed, though promised seed, prevailed upon Abram to unite himself, in a secondary marriage, to Hagar, Sarai's handmaid. This was doubtless the effect of sinful impatience on the part of Sarai, and was agreed to with what cannot be considered as an innocent acquiescence upon the part of Abram. Like most other sinful compliances, this act of the patriarch was succeeded by vexation and punishment. Insolence and contempt soon

took possession of the handmaid: jealousy and discontent assailed her mistress; while, for nearly fourteen years, all personal manifestations of the Almighty to his faithful, but in this instance erring, servant were suspended. We do not mean to *assert* that the long intermission of the delightful manifestations with which Abram was favoured by the great Jehovah, was intended as the punishment of this offence; but it appears neither unscriptural nor unreasonable to conclude that it was so, when we remember how often, in all ages, similar conduct has been followed by similar results, and men's "sins have separated between them and their God, and hid as it were his face from them."

My brethren, do you ever complain that in your own case, communion with the Most High is more than usually difficult; that it is not with you as in times past: that your intercourse with Heaven is impeded; that (as the apostle expresses it) your prayers are "hindered;" that your very praises appear to have lost their wings, and to be unable to rise through the clouded atmosphere which surrounds you? This is a state of mind not absolutely unknown, we believe, to any among the children of God; when meditation becomes irksome, prayer wearisome, and all intercourse with heaven cold, dead, and unprofitable: it is, we believe, consonant with the painful experience of most Christians, when we say that such feelings are neither unknown nor unfrequent; when the spiritual life is so deadened within us, that the slightest heavenward motion is an effort, and real inward communion so little felt and enjoyed, that we are almost tempted by our spiritual enemy to forego the mockery of the external form. This is usually termed the hidings of God's face, and too often and too hastily attributed to the mere sovereignty of God, while a little careful self-examination would frequently enable us to discover that the cause is not in God, but in ourselves; that if the gracious visitings of the Spirit of God to the soul of the believer have been intermitted; if the promise of our divine Master, "We will come unto him and make our abode with him," appear to

remain unfulfilled, some secret sin, some unrestrained temper, some unholy compliance, some unchecked and unchastened desire, like the Achan in the camp of Israel, is suffered to be undetected in the heart, and to rob us of the promised blessing.

While it is thus in judgment, it is also in mercy, in great and distinguishing mercy, that, under circumstances such as these, the Lord withdraws himself from us for a season. If we suffered the due reward of our deeds, He would withdraw himself from us, not for a season, but for ever. How infinitely then does our gracious Redeemer magnify his love to you, if you are a child of God, when in the very act of chastening ! He well knows, that although while He was with you, you far too little estimated his presence, yet if you have once truly experienced his love, you will never be happy, never be at peace, under a conviction of his absence. It is therefore by this temporary withdrawal that He teaches you to “examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith,” to “judge yourselves that ye be not judged of the Lord,” and, above all to look and long and pray for his return. It is thus that He produces those exercises of faith and love so often referred to by the church of old, when she says, “By night on my bed I sought Him whom my soul loveth ; I sought Him, but I found Him not ;”—those mourning exercises, the most painful, but perhaps amongst the most profitable of the Christian life, which, while sorrow and wo occupy the heart and compel you to “sow in tears,” enable you, in the issue, by the return of the light of God’s countenance, to “reap in joy.”

After fourteen years had elapsed, during which, as we have observed, Abram had been debarred from all extraordinary communings with the Most High, we find the Almighty again appearing to him, urging him to a more perfect walk with God : “I am the Almighty God ; walk before me and be thou perfect ;” repeating the assurances of the unalterable nature of the covenant which he had made with him, and instituting the rite of circumcision, that “sign,” or “seal,” as the apostle to the Romans expresses it, “of the faith which he had, yet being

uncircumcised," and by which alone he had long before been justified, "not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision."

It was at this period of the patriarch's history that the Almighty made that remarkable change in the name both of Abram and his wife, which should convey to their remote posterity the remembrance of the honour which they had received from the Lord. "Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, (a high father,) but thy name shall be called Abraham, (the father of a numerous progeny;) for a father of many nations have I made thee." "And as for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, (my princess,) but Sarah (a princess,) shall her name be." "She shall be a mother of nations, kings of people shall be of her." This was the manner in which the Almighty, from of old, distinguished those whom the Lord delighted to honour. This is the manner in which the kings of the earth have in all ages, by titles of distinction and names of renown, adorned their favourites and elevated them above their fellows. And this is still the manner,—but O! how infinitely superior in its results, how far more blessed in its imperishable consequences!—that our King, the King of kings and the Lord of lords, has promised to designate his covenanting people; by giving them, as St. John declares, "a new name which no man knoweth, saving he that receiveth it." Do you inquire what that new name may be?—it is the new name of adoption, even "the child of God." This is the name which in the ear and heart of the believer supersedes every other name; which marks at once his separation from the family of the first Adam, in which he was born by nature, and his complete and joyful reception into the family of the second Adam, into which he has been brought by grace. This is indeed a title worthy of all your efforts, all your prayers; a title conferred upon the meanest and lowest believers, freely offered to the poorest of you whom I now address, and yet without which the wealthiest and most distinguished among you can never enter into the kingdom of God.

Examine then, earnestly and prayerfully, my brethren, each

for yourself, whether this change of name, the necessary and inseparable accompaniment of change of heart, has passed upon you ; whether you are one of the sheep belonging to the fold of the good Shepherd, of whom it is said, " He knoweth his sheep by name ;" whether, in the language of the Psalmist, " when God writeth up his people," He can say of you, " This man was born in Zion." " None knoweth it saving he that receiveth it," saith our Lord : none can know it, none can feel and enjoy it, but you who have been made the blessed subjects of that renovating change to which it applies ; to all others it is incomprehensible, unintelligible—in the language of the world, mysticism, and enthusiasm. To you it is the never-ceasing testimony to the power of God and the love of God in Christ Jesus, " the promise of the life which now is, and of that which is to come," written as with a sunbeam upon your heart ; for if a child of God, then an heir, an heir of God and joint-heir with Christ, to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away. O slight not this glorious distinction ! do not value lightly a name and a privilege which the eternal Son of God left the bosom of his Father to purchase for you, which the eternal Spirit of God esteems it his highest prerogative to ratify and to apply ; without which the eternal Jehovah can never be to you a Father, or you become his " sons and daughters, saith the Lord God Almighty."

No sooner had Abraham heard the word of the Lord, " Sarah shall be a mother of nations, kings of people shall be of her," than we are told, " that he fell upon his face and laughed," We are not for a moment to imagine that Abram's laughter was the effect of doubt or mistrust, for we are expressly told, in the epistle to the Romans, that " he staggered not at the promise through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully persuaded that what He had promised He was able also to perform." When therefore he fell upon his face and laughed, he prostrated himself, a token of reverence for the divine Being who spake to him ; and he laughed, or exulted greatly, an evidence of his certainty of the promise.

which was made him. How remarkable a demonstration of that faith which is "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen!" How strong an expression of that which was still future, was still to the eye of sense uncertain and improbable! And yet, my brethren, is it not thus that the true and established believer learns, even upon earth, not only to believe and trust, but to exult in the prospect of heaven, and to rest upon the promises of God with a certainty of hope and a fulness of joy, which to the doubting Christian are utterly unknown! Strive earnestly to realize something of this delightful yet humble confidence in your own experience; endeavour to rest with the simplicity of an assured and scriptural faith upon all the declarations of God, and you will not only be enabled to rejoice in the certainty of the glory which shall be revealed in you, but in the certainty of every present help, of grace and strength and guidance on the way which leads to it; "for," says the apostle, "all the promises of God in Christ Jesus, (of the means as well as the end,) are yea and (in Him) amen unto the glory of God by us."

Three* months only had elapsed after the rite of circumcision had been instituted, and the change of Abram's name had taken place, when a manifestation of the Almighty, perhaps the most remarkable recorded in the Old Testament, was vouchsafed. It is thus narrated in the simple and beautiful language of the inspired historian; "The Lord appeared unto Abram in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent-door in the heat of the day; and he lift up his eyes and looked, and lo, three men stood by him; and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent-door, and bowed himself toward the ground, and said, My Lord, if now I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant; let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree; and I will fetch a morsel of bread, and comfort ye your hearts: after that ye shall pass on; for therefore are ye come to your servant. And they said, So, do as thou

* Dr. Lightfoot.

hast said." The three personages here spoken of have been considered by many to have been only three created angels, sent from the presence of the Lord ; but this can scarcely be the case, when we find their appearance spoken of in the text as an appearance of "the Lord," and again, one of them expressly called "the Lord" in the thirteenth verse, and speaking, in the following verses, in language which no created being would, surely, venture to assume. Some commentators think that as the narrative commences by saying, "The Lord appeared unto Abraham," and as Abraham addresses the three together under the appellation of "my Lord," it was probably a manifestation of the three persons of the holy Trinity. This opinion, however, appears very contrary to the general tenor of Scripture, in which we find no instance upon record of the Father or the Holy Ghost ever assuming the human form ; while, again, in the latter part of the story, when the two angels had left the third with Abraham, and had gone on to Sodom, they say, "The Lord hath sent us to destroy this city." I allude to this because some authority has been improperly attached to this misapprehension, from the circumstance of our church selecting this portion of holy writ as one of the lessons for Trinity Sunday. We should imagine that her intention was not to adduce this as a proof of the trinity of the persons, but of the plurality of the persons in the Godhead : one of the persons of the blessed Trinity being here evidently present upon the earth, while the eternal Father, "whom none hath seen nor can see, was dwelling in the light which no man may approach unto."

It was during the plain repast of the angels, beneath the wide-spreading branches of the over-shadowing tree, while Abraham with the simple manners of that early age, stood by them himself at once their servant and their host, that the first of these remarkable personages thus addressed him : "Where is Sarah, thy wife ? and he said, Behold, in the tent. And he said, I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life ; and lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son. And Sarah heard ~~him~~

in the tent-door, which was behind him, and laughed within herself." This action of Sarah was precisely similar, in its external appearance, to that of Abraham, of which we have already spoken, and yet how widely different in its motives and intention. While he laughed from the exulting feeling of an unhesitating faith, she, on the contrary, laughed in all the incredulity of a doubting mind. "They did not more agree in their desire," says Bishop Hall, "than differ in their affection: Abraham laughed for joy, Sarah for distrust; Abraham laughed because he believed it would be so, Sarah because she believed it could not be so." "And the Lord said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old? Is any thing too hard for the Lord? Then Sarah denied, saying, I laughed not, for she was afraid." Thus adding to the sin by the cowardly concealment and the guilty falsehood, and receiving the merited reproof of the Most High, "Nay, but thou didst laugh," at the very moment when, if her faith had been stronger, she might have been enjoying, with unmingled feelings of happiness, her greatest earthly blessing.

Beware, my brethren, from her example, I most solemnly charge you, beware of every thought, every publication, every person that would teach you to receive even the minutest portion of the revelation of God with the feeling of incredulity, or the smile of ridicule. The protection of the most crowded assembly, the secrecy of the most private retirement, will alike be unavailing to shield you from the eye of Him from whom no secrets are hid. Sarah laughed behind the door of the tent, where no human eye could witness it, and yet the Lord saw it: be careful that he never sees on your countenance the smile of distrust, the sneer of derision at his promises, his precepts, his people. How common a sin is this at the present day, how injurious to the cause of God, how little is it thought of now by those who are guilty of it, how unceasingly will it be remembered by them in eternity! The profane joke, the contemptuous appellation, the sneer of imaginary superiority, the open ridicule, the mockery of the saints of the Most High,

how will the eternal echo of that laughter chill the heart and appal the soul on that great and coming day when every excuse will be unavailing, every denial vain ; “ NAY, BUT THOU DIDST LAUGH,” will carry a pang to the scorner’s soul, which eternity itself will not enable him to forget, “ NAY, BUT THOU DIDST LAUGH,” will continue to sound in his ears, and to oppress his spirit, when he and laughter shall have long been strangers, and when tears, and sighing, and mourning, and wo, have been his unchanged, and shall be his unchangeable portion ; for of all laughter such as this, the word of God has pronounced the termination and the fate, “ The end of that mirth is heaviness ;” “ Wo unto you that laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.”

LECTURE IX.

GENESIS XVIII. 19.

“ For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord.”

THE inspired historian having recorded the instance of Sarah’s incredulity, with which the last lecture concluded, thus continues the narrative : “ And the men rose up from thence, and looked towards Sodom : and Abraham went with them to bring them on the way. And the Lord said,” even the angel Jehovah, who was one of the three, “ Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do ; seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him ? For I know him that, he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment ; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.”

How remarkable is the reason here alleged by the Almighty for communicating his intentions to the faithful patriarch ! “ I

know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, they shall keep the way of the Lord." Abraham's family religion, therefore, his determination to honour God himself, and to see that his children and servants also honoured the Lord, is given as the reason for his being made acquainted with the intentions of the Most High.

My brethren, let me urge you seriously to inquire, whether you have ever sufficiently considered the obligations of this great duty for which the patriarch was so highly honoured? Are you equally zealous for the Lord God of Hosts in your families and in your households? In what manner are you educating, or permitting others to educate, your children? Are you satisfied if their advancement in that species of learning which the world has agreed to denominate good education, be proportionable to your expectations, although the one great business of life, the very purpose for which they have been sent into existence, has been neglected? Are you contented if your boys have learnt a certain number of languages, and your girls a certain number of accomplishments, although they may scarcely know whether they possess an immortal soul, or in what manner that soul is to be prepared for the never-ending futurity? Do you sufficiently bear in mind, that your children are lent to you by God, to be trained by you for God: I say, *lent* to you, for who shall tell how speedily these precious loans shall be resumed, how quickly they shall be summoned into a world, where all the accomplishments for which you now are willing to sacrifice every other acquisition, will be utterly useless; a world whose unnumbered myriads speak but one language, and sing but one song, which is for ever new, and will be for ever delightful, when all that is now thought worthy of acquirement shall have passed away and been forgotten? How often, even in Christian parents, do we find the most lamentable inconsistency in these things, the most fearful forgetfulness of these great truths; how often do we see Christian parents priding themselves the most upon those very qualifications in their children, which will one day only

lead them the deeper into all the temptations and follies of an ungodly world: looking with gratification chiefly upon their progress in those fashionable accomplishments, which will merely render them the readier victims to the great enemies of our souls, “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life.” How few are there who possess sufficient faith, and sufficient courage and resolution, really to educate their children for God! To resolve and to act upon that resolution, that every species of knowledge, every acquirement should, we will not say be disregarded, for we are no advocates for that contracted state of mind and habit of thought, which a contracted education is too apt to induce; but while every species of knowledge, and every useful acquirement should be cultivated, and highly cultivated, still to resolve that all should be kept in complete and entire subserviency to the knowledge of God in Christ Jesus our Lord, and to the acquirement of Christian motives, and Christian principles. To this great work, to this blessed end, all your prayers, your efforts, your advice, and example, should be perpetually tending. From their earliest infancy,—and you may begin much earlier than persons in general imagine, for a child even of three years old is not too young to commence with, not too young to worship God, and to lisp the name of that Saviour who thought none too young to come to his arms, and to receive his blessing,—from their very earliest infancy, therefore, your children should be taught to know that this is the one leading object of all your instructions to them, of all your desires for them. While we urge this upon you, we would however acknowledge our convictions that it is not so much in early infancy that these things are neglected. We believe that few mothers, that no Christian mothers, are in the habit of neglecting to instruct their children, so far as their own light and knowledge in spiritual things enable them.

The mischief usually commences when the child is partially separated from the parents. As a very eminent writer of the present day has observed, “It is one of the evils of our schools,

public, and private, that the habits of devotion which a child learns at his mother's knees are broken, and the seeds of early piety destroyed."* It is certainly too often at our schools, more especially our public schools,† that evil company and evil counsels, combined with an education which is far better qualified to form an accomplished heathen, than a spiritually-minded Christian, obliterate and uproot all that remains of maternal teaching, and infantile instruction. While at those intervals, when, as at the approaching season, the children return to the parent's roof, the mother's authority is at an end, and instead of every effort being employed, every opportunity anxiously seized to "strengthen the things which remain, and are ready to die," pleasure and idleness, folly and dissipation, are too frequently all that await them; so that the poor child, throughout the years of education, is living in a perpetual interchange of the heathen lessons of classical lore, and, in too many instances, the heathen practices of fashionable society; and when at length ushered into the world, who shall affect astonishment, that a child so educated is only in name and profession a Christian?

My brethren, with every desire, and at every expense of time and thought, and precept and prayer, it is no easy matter to bring up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Our own daily life and conversation must be in some degree conformed to the rule of God's word, before we can even hope to do so. Children soon learn to attend to what they see, in preference to what they hear: if these do not harmonize, example is followed, and precept is disregarded.

Consider then seriously, my brethren, if you love your children, if you value your own souls, how you are standing

* Southey's Colloquies, vol. ii. p. 94.

† "Public Schools."—The Author is glad to avail himself of this opportunity to acknowledge, that there is reason to believe that much improvement is taking place with regard to religious instruction, at least in one of the most celebrated of these establishments—an example which he sincerely prays may be speedily followed by all others.

before God in this particular at the present moment. In your families, will it be impossible, on the great day of account, to plead a parent's example in justification of a child's delinquencies? Do your children never behold you, upon frivolous pretences, neglecting the service of this house, or the duties of this hallowed day of rest? Have they never learnt from your example the first principles of licentiousness, of covetousness, of intemperance, or of want of charity? Will it be impossible for any child of yours to say, on that great day when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, "The first oath, or the first falsehood I ever heard, I heard from the lips of a parent?" "The first time I ever used profane language, or spoke slightly of the things or the people of God, I was not reprov'd by my parents." "The first time I ever entered those scenes which afterwards became my ruin, I entered them with the knowledge, and the sanction, and even in the company of my parents!"

We do not say that such things are; we trust that in this congregation they are not; but if they are, at how immeasurable a distance must such parents be from the patriarch before us! The Almighty has recorded it, to Abraham's everlasting honour, that he would not only advise and counsel his children and household in the ways of God, and accompany these counsels by his own consistent and holy life, but that he would command as a master, where he failed to influence as a father. Parental authority, therefore, that by-gone word, must accompany parental prayers, and parental precepts, and be enforced, if you would walk in the steps, and inherit the blessedness of Abraham. God saw that Eli reasoned and expostulated with his children, and that in a manner which many at the present day would consider as more than sufficiently serious, and sufficiently severe, but God cut him off and his family around him, "because his sons made themselves vile, and he *restrained* them not." God saw that the guilt and usurpation of Adonijah lay at the door of David, his too fond and partial parent; for the Spirit of God has recorded this as the remarkable reason

of all his delinquencies, because "his father had not displeased him at any time in saying, Why hast thou done so?" How widely different was the case of the holy man before us! The Almighty saw that Abram would be guilty of no such weakness; that he would "*command* his family and his household after him." Nothing short of this, therefore, will be considered by God as fulfilling the duties of Christian parents and Christian masters. We must "**RESTRAIN**" our children, we must "**COMMAND**" our household in the ways of holiness, and in the paths of righteousness; or if they perish, we shall not be guiltless of their blood, we shall not have delivered our souls.

Continuing the history before us, we are informed that the Lord, addressing himself, as it appears, to Abraham, said, "Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous, I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it which is come unto me, and if not I will know." We find the Almighty here condescending as He has often done, to speak after the fashion of men, to render the perfect equity and undoubted righteousness of his judicial proceedings as obvious to the eye of reason as they have ever been, and must ever be, to the eye of faith. "I will go down and see"—I will thoroughly investigate and accurately know before I punish. Perhaps also to give Abraham more boldness in interceding for the guilty, when he saw that the sentence had not gone forth fully ratified and confirmed.

Then commences the most remarkable instance of human intercession to be met with in the revealed word of God, in which the faithfulness of Abraham and his near access to a throne of grace, the astonishing loving-kindness and forbearance of the great Jehovah, are painted in colours which the pencil of uninspired mortality dare not imitate. "And Abraham drew near and said, wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city, wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty

righteous that are therein? that be far from thee: shall not the judge of all the earth do right? And the Lord said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes. And Abraham answered and said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes: peradventure there shall lack five of the fifty righteous, wilt thou destroy all the city for lack of five? And He said, if I find there forty and five, I will not destroy it." Thus did Abraham, still presuming to plead with holy boldness, continue to intercede, and thus did the Almighty continue to bestow, until the number of the righteous was reduced to ten, and the Lord mercifully declared, "If ten be found there, I will not destroy it for ten's sake."

Having reduced the number of the righteous to this little company, Abraham ceased; so that it has been truly said that "Abraham was tired of asking before God was tired of granting." Who can affirm, that if Abraham had persevered in thus earnestly and faithfully wrestling with God, until he had reduced the number even to a solitary individual, even to "just Lot," the one righteous man within the accursed Sodom, who will assert that he might not still have "had power with God and have prevailed?" We are not straitened in God; when we cease to ask, it is because we are straitened in ourselves. "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it," is the declaration of God himself. Who shall presume to place a limit to faithful persevering prayer, other than that which our Lord himself has recorded, "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son."

How important then is the privilege, how urgent the duty of intercessory prayer for our country, our family, our friends! Shall Abraham be thus fervent, thus anxious in behalf of a guilty city, by whose destruction he could by no possibility have been injured; and will you be silent, or cold, or indifferent, in behalf of your native land, which contains every thing you love and value here below? If you have never yet interceded with God for the mass of ignorance, and impiety, and sin,

by which we are surrounded, let me urge you to commence in earnest this day ; pray for the general outpouring of the Spirit of God upon the thousands and tens of thousands who disgrace the Christian name and dishonour this Christian country. Pray especially that those misguided men, who by their infidel harangues, and widely disseminated atheistical publications, are, we fear, at the present time, injuring the principles, and jeopardizing the souls of thousands, may be brought to the knowledge of the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom He has sent, before they have called down the vengeance of the Almighty upon themselves and their misguided followers, and the country whose evil lot it is to be the theatre of their guilty exertions.

While remembering that it is your duty thus to intercede for all who require your prayers, be still more earnest for those who have the closest claims upon you. Remember at all times, more particularly when drawing near in faith and love to the table of your Lord, those who are endeared to you by the ties of affinity and friendship. Intercede especially for your parents, the wife of your bosom, the children of your love. If any of these be still unhappily at a distance from God, be earnest, be unceasing in your petitions that they may be "brought nigh by the blood of the cross." Abraham's zeal, Abraham's prayer, although for a noble purpose, were for a purpose infinitely inferior to yours ; his were to save the bodies of sinners from a fiery sepulture, yours to pluck their immortal souls "as brands from the burning." Will you be remiss, can you be indifferent in interceding for such an object as this ? Can you bear even for a moment to dwell upon the thought, that they whom you have loved and caressed on earth, shall, as Chillingworth expresses it, instead of shining gloriously as the stars in the firmament of God's love, glare hideously as the flames in the dungeons of his wrath ? God forbid that you should cease to pray for them ! The day will come which will bring its reward with it, when every faithful prayer shall be answered, either by the salvation of those for whom you have pleaded, or

by the increase of peace and joy which it shall bring when it returns into your own bosom.

While, therefore, you remember with Abraham, that you are but "dust and ashes," that in your own name, and in your own merits, you cannot venture to address yourself to God, remember for your consolation and encouragement, that you have a High Priest within the veil, who will present your poor petitions at the throne of his Father; who will do more than this—who will intercede for you, and for the object of your prayers, in a manner that Abraham never interceded; for the intercession of Jesus cannot weary, his petitions cannot fail. Whether, therefore, you pray for others, or for yourself, let the eye of faith be fixed on Him, even on that Saviour, who "ever liveth to make intercession for you." Who stands before the heavenly altar, with the golden censer; and the smoke of whose incense, even his own merits, accompanies the prayers of the saints, ascending up in perpetual intercession before God, out of the angel's hand. How comforting, how delightful a thought to the true believer! Abraham's intercession, with all his fervency, and after all his efforts, could only avail to save the devoted cities of the plain, if ten righteous men could have been found in Sodom. Our glorious Intercessor has availed to save ten thousand times ten thousand of the guilty progeny of Adam, though not one righteous man has been found throughout all their generations. Well may we unite with grateful hearts in that angelic hymn on earth, which shall be the burden of our songs in heaven: "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing," now, henceforth, and for ever.

LECTURE X.

GENESIS XXI. 10.

“She said unto Abraham, Cast out this bond-woman and her son ; for the son of this bond-woman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac.”

“THE gifts and callings of God are without repentance,” says the inspired word of the Most High. If it were otherwise, assuredly Abraham would never, after all his trials and all his difficulties, have been the progenitor of the promised seed. He had before sinned by equivocating with Pharaoh ; he now sinned by equivocating with Abimelech ; declaring again that Sarah was his sister, leaving it to be inferred that she was not his wife ; and thus, from a base and cowardly distrust of the divine guardianship and the divine protection, exposing her to the very danger from which, by a sinful evasion, he was endeavouring to shield her. Happy was it for Abraham, happy is it for ourselves, “that the Lord is our keeper !” There is not a blessing which we enjoy, either in possession or in prospect, from the most common endowment of divine Providence to the richest, and most glorious, and most distinguished mercy of divine grace, which we could hope to retain now, or to inherit hereafter, if wholly dependent upon our own carefulness, or watchfulness, or caution. I say, if “wholly dependent,” because he who presumes to look to the Lord to keep him, without setting himself earnestly to strive, and watch, and pray, will as assuredly be disappointed, as the husbandman who should look to the Almighty in the day of harvest, after neglecting to work, and standing all the day idle in the season of seed-time.

Guarding the subject thus, as the word of God has thought it necessary and sufficient to guard it, I would repeat, thanks be to God, that his “gifts and callings are without repentance.” Even the spiritual life of the soul, the richest gift in the treasury of heaven, would quickly perish from our grasp beneath the

united efforts of the world, the flesh and the devil, were it not for the faithfulness of Him who has "promised, who also will do it." Were it not that "our life is hid with Christ in God," so hidden that the craft of our spiritual enemies cannot search it out, that the darts of the wicked one cannot reach it, our enjoyment of this inestimable treasure would indeed be transitory and precarious. Adam himself, in the midst of all his innocency and all his happiness, could not retain the precious boon, though he had but one tempter and one temptation. You have ten thousand tempters and ten thousand temptations, with a deceitful and desperately wicked heart within your bosom ready to listen to and to love, and to be beguiled by them all. How then could you hope to stand where he has fallen? You could not possess the remotest prospect of success, were it not from the unchangeableness of the Lord, who, if you are indeed among his followers, has made you what you are: and if you earnestly and faithfully seek Him, will keep you what you are, till time shall be no more, and sin, and temptation, and sorrow, shall have fled away for ever. Yes, my brethren, as it was with Abraham, so is it frequently with ourselves: while we by our carelessness, or guiltiness, or cowardice, are apparently frustrating the grace of God, and rendering the promises of God of none effect, "the foundation of the Lord standeth sure, having this seal, 'The Lord knoweth them that are his;'" and he is mercifully preparing a scourge for us, of our own procuring, to drive us back again into the fold from which we have so sinfully and guiltily wandered.

It was thus that when even Abraham, "the friend of God," so far forgot his high calling as to prevaricate and falsify, the Almighty subjected him to be reproved by one far less distinguished than himself in the knowledge of the Most High, and to be publicly disgraced by Abimelech, before his assembled servants, with a reproof which he was unable to answer: "Thou hast done deeds unto me that ought not to be done." The Almighty, however, did not on this account deprive him of the promised blessing: Abraham was reproved, and Abraham

repented, and received a pardon which he could not have deserved, for a sin which he could not have extenuated.

Such is the humbling history of the Christian's life; love, mercy, and pardon, on the part of God; sin, coldness, and forgetfulness, followed by a deep and heartfelt sorrow, contrition and amendment, on the part of his people. O that while God, for his dear Son's sake, thus bears with us, my brethren; while all his promises in Christ Jesus stand firmer than the foundations of the earth on which we live; we may be daily becoming more sensible of his love, more grateful for his forbearance, more consistently obedient to his will, more anxious for his salvation!

A twelvemonth had, in all probability, scarcely elapsed, after the visit of the Lord to Abraham, which was recorded in our last discourse, before the long-expected blessing was vouchsafed. "For Sarah conceived and bare Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him." Very profitable it is to observe how much the inspired writers love to trace every particular of every blessing to the hands of Him who sends it; in two short verses, "the Lord visited Sarah as he had said, the Lord did unto Sarah as he had spoken," "at the set time of which God had spoken." The gift itself, the time and manner of it, are all referred to the merciful Jehovah. How it sweetens even the daily and common mercies of the Christian, to be thus habitually referred to God! From the births of your children, and the great and prominent mercies and advantages, and anniversaries of your lives, down to the humblest meal, the bread and water of the poorest among you, if you are living to God, you will deduce subjects of praise and thanksgiving, and grateful memorial. The Almighty has thought nothing which can affect the happiness and comfort of his children, too trifling to be inserted in the everlasting covenant, for "it has the promise of the life which now is, as well as that which is to come." Surely, therefore, you should think nothing too small, nothing too trifling, in which to recognize his hand, and for which to offer him your thanksgivings.

In due time, then, as we have seen, Isaac the promised son was born: "And the child grew and was weaned, and Abraham made a great feast the same day that Isaac was weaned;" not on the day that he was circumcised. That was a religious ordinance, in which other duties, far more important than entertaining his family, were to be observed. It remained for our days, and for the purer dispensation under which we live, to witness a time of religious duty, one of the highest services and holiest sacraments of our church, even the baptisms of our children, converted into an occasion of banqueting and feasting. Such a reason is most appropriate for collecting our families around us in social and innocent assembly, and those who take part in that holy ordinance and will aid us with their prayers: but most inappropriate to be made a day of feasting, and revelry, and song. The admirable service of our church for that holy sacrament teaches us to pray that "the child may lead the rest of his life *according to this beginning*;" a prayer which has often come with melancholy forebodings to my heart, when I have seen the assemblage of fashionable friends and the preparation for the evening party to celebrate the christening of some loved child; a prayer sometimes, alas! we fear, too accurately and too painfully fulfilled; for how often has our church been called to bear witness to the melancholy fact, that a Christian course thus begun in all the frivolity of worldliness and dissipation, has continued during "the rest of the life," a most true and faithful counterpart of the manner in which it has commenced, and has closed with a sad accomplishment of the parent's thoughtless petition, a youth of folly, an old age of sin, and an end "ACCORDING TO THIS BEGINNING."

It was on this day of feasting that another remarkable event in Abraham's domestic history took place. There was in Abraham's house, as we have had reason to observe in a former part of the history, not only Sarah and her child, but Abraham's secondary wife, Hagar, and her son Ishmael, who, if Isaac was three years old when he was weaned, which is the

date affixed by the learned, was now in his seventeenth year. He had probably been led to expect, as the only child of his father Abraham, that he should inherit at least a very large portion of the abundance by which he was surrounded. The birth of Isaac, therefore, must have given a death-blow to these expectations: here was at once a legitimate heir to all the wealth of Abraham, a son not of the bond-woman but of the free-woman. Ishmael, therefore, could hope but for a scanty portion either of the consideration or the wealth, to which the heir of so powerful a prince as Abraham might be fairly entitled.

The effect of this disappointment was not slow in manifesting itself; on the very day that Isaac was weaned, "Sarah saw the son of Hagar, the Egyptian, which she had borne unto Abraham, mocking," claiming the birthright and the inheritance, as appears from Sarah's speech to Abraham, and perhaps mocking at the promise of God with respect to Isaac, and despising him as the younger son.

Sarah, unable to bear a sight so deeply painful to the feelings of a parent, and acting moreover, under the directions of the Most High, said unto Abraham, "Cast out this bond-woman and her son, for the son of this bond-woman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac. And the thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight, because of his son." Notwithstanding, being assured by God that this was all in the due course of his providential arrangements, he hearkened unto the voice of Sarah, and sent forth into "the waste howling wilderness" the unhappy mother and her wayward son.

My younger brethren, let me urge you to mark well this incident in Ishmael's childhood. Ishmael was but a boy, yet his actions were observed, and recorded, and punished by the great Jehovah. Do not therefore shelter yourselves under the too frequent excuse that "boys must be boys;" that there is one rule of conduct for the hey-day of youth, and another for the maturity of manhood. From the moment that you know the guilt of an untrue or an unchaste expression, the iniquity

of an oath, the impiety of profaning the name, or of mocking at the things or the people of God, from that moment, be it at what age it may, you are as answerable before God, and you will be as accountable before the bar of his justice, as, “the sinner of an hundred years old.” Let me urge you, then, to the greater carefulness against those temptations so peculiar to your age and sex; say not with him of old, “Our lips are our own, who is Lord over us?” but pray that God himself may “set a watch before your mouth and keep the door of your lips;” and as out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh, that He may renew and purify and “cleanse your hearts by the inspiration of his Holy Spirit.”

It is well worthy of observation, how completely the little incident before us exemplifies, so far as in this finite state of existence and imperfect state of moral and spiritual apprehension it is possible to exemplify, the mysterious dealings of God with man in regard to the undiscovered future. It might not unnaturally be said, that if the Almighty had selected the child of promise, even Isaac, for Abraham’s heir, as it is revealed that He had, He could not do otherwise than reject Ishmael from the expected inheritance: that the one must be the following consequence of the other. This is the manner, passing from things temporal to things spiritual, in which men invariably reason upon the mysteries of God; drawing those deductions which, to the finite sense and limited scan of mortals, are apparently undeniable, and then presuming to question the justice or the mercy of the Omnipotent. Now let us examine the history before us, and see whether the facts will bear us out in the reasoning. Was Ishmael thus banished by any decree of God, irrespectively of his own conduct? Most assuredly not: Ishmael had remained in Abraham’s house, and might have continued to remain there, for any influence that God’s decree or promise, with regard to Isaac, would have possessed over his future fortunes. It was simply because *Ishmael mocked at Isaac*; because “he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit;” because he

did not conduct himself as a true child of Abraham; that Ishmael was driven from the comforts and solaces of home, a wanderer and an outcast. Could Ishmael complain that any other reason whatever was the cause of his banishment? Could he urge any decree of the Almighty as the motive for the exile from his father's house? It was impossible. When he looked back from the burning sands of the desert to the pleasant shade of his paternal tents, he could charge his present misery to no one but himself and his own unworthy conduct. He would be compelled to say, "It is just strictly, undeniably just, that I should forfeit that which I did not value, that I should no longer dwell with him whom I mocked and persecuted, that I should for ever lose an inheritance of which I had rendered myself so utterly unworthy."

Thus it will be at the last day, my brethren, with every impenitent sinner. No single being of all that sad and hopeless multitude who shall pass through the dreary gate into the regions of eternal sorrow—for "Wide is the gate, and broad is the way, and many there be which go in thereat"—will be able to attribute his misery and his condemnation to any other causes than his own iniquity and sin. While that "GOD IS LOVE" will echo throughout eternity in the many mansions of our Father's kingdom, that "GOD IS JUST" will echo throughout the same eternity in the dungeons of condemnation. Every soul who enters there, will be compelled to admit, I am here from my own stubbornness, my own obduracy, my own sin. The promises of God were set before me as often as before others; the way of everlasting life was pointed out to me as often as to others; I was urged, entreated, reasoned with, solicited as affectionately and as frequently as others; often, how often would the Saviour of the world have gathered me, as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, and I would not? I have "denied the Holy One and the Just;" I have "trodden under foot the Son of God, and have counted the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, and have done despite to the Spirit of grace," therefore am I here, and therefore must I remain here,

consigned to the blackness of darkness for ever. How will every pang be strengthened, every arrow of God's wrath be sharpened, by convictions such as these ! It would be some alleviation to the suffering spirit to be enabled to complain, I am here from the cruel decree of a cruel Maker, which I have striven, and prayed, and struggled to avoid ; I was from all eternity condemned to this embittered lot, this imprisonment in everlasting burnings. But even this solace, if solace it might be, will be denied the sinner ; his own soul, and his own judgment, and his own voice, must for ever echo back the eternal truth,—my sins, my obstinacy, my impenitence, and these alone, have placed me where I am !

My brethren, would you escape so fearful, so horrible a fate ? Then for ever bear in mind that the word of God has declared, " All are not Israel who are of Israel, neither because they are of the seed of Abraham are they all children." Trust to no external relationship to God, but earnestly seek to ascertain whether you have been really made, by the power of divine grace, the children of the promise, even " the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus," and whether you can in all humility, yet with all holy confidence, truly say, " The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." This is the real touchstone of a religious profession, this is the blessed appropriation of the promises, which ensures that you shall " neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ," nor ashamed nor uncertain in that day when He " shall make up his jewels." Rest, therefore, in nothing short of this ; it is at the present moment freely offered to you, for whosoever will may now partake of like precious faith with Abraham, may now be Abraham's child, and Abraham's heir ; but the day is fast approaching to each of us, when these offers must cease ; when the fountain opened on Calvary shall be sealed up ; when the voice of the crier, " Ho ! every one that thirsteth !" shall be quenched in silence ; when the children of the promise shall enter their Father's house, and gather round their

Father's board, and delight themselves in their Father's society, and when the mocking Ishmaels, and the worldly minded Esaus, shall be shut out for ever.

LECTURE XI.

GENESIS XXII. 8.

“And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt-offering.”

WE enter this morning upon the subject of Abraham's greatest and severest trial, the offering of his son, his long-promised and only son Isaac, at the command of his God. May every portion of this affecting and improving narrative be carried to our hearts, that, like him of whom we are about to speak, we may be taught by the Spirit of God, both to think nothing too dear, nothing too valuable, to be freely resigned at the desire of our heavenly Father; and to believe that no circumstances can be too dark, none too difficult, for us to be guided by the spirit, or delivered by the providence of the Lord Jehovah.

“It came to pass,” says the inspired writer, “after these things, that God did tempt Abraham.” After these things? After so many years of faithful following, and such close and intimate walking with God? Yes, the trials of the child of God end only with his life. Upon first entering the heavenward course, we are apt to imagine, a little more experience, a little more grace, and I shall be out of reach of these sins which now so easily beset me. Alas! as we move forward we find that although our trials and our temptations be changed, they are not destroyed; new enemies spring up around us, there are fresh struggles to be engaged in, fresh battles to be fought, fresh victories to be won. “Mortify therefore your members which are upon earth,” your lusts, your passions, your desires, your tempers: make this your daily, hourly

occupation, the occupation from which you will find, and must desire to find, no respite here below ; for if you “be not engaged in killing sin, sin will assuredly be engaged in killing you.” You may indeed be dead with Christ, you may indeed have risen with him, yet “after these things” you will be just as continually exposed to the power of temptation as you were before. Sin will still be endeavouring to bring you under bondage to the power of the flesh ; and though its efforts may be less conspicuous and its temptations less gross, as the stillest waters are generally the deepest waters, it will be as dangerous and delusive as ever ; and you must be as prayerful, as watchful, as continually upon your guard, as vigorous in your defence after you have attained to the highest degree of spiritual knowledge and spiritual love, as you were at the first trembling steps which led you to the foot of the cross. It is true, you may now and then discover a green spot, and a shady resting-place in this wilderness state, but you will have scarcely begun to feel yourselves at home there, to “enlarge the place of your tent, to lengthen your cords, and strengthen your stakes,” when the command will come to strike your tents and move forward, to meet new difficulties and trials, until the desert be passed through, and the celestial city gained ; enemies and temptations and sorrows assailing you every mile of the weary journey. If this appear to be a depressing picture of the Christian’s course, we can not only say, that we believe it to be a true one, but that though true, we do not think it *is* a depressing picture ; because the Christian’s confidence does not, and must not flow from any assurance of the absence of temptation, but from the perfect reliance which he has in that Saviour who has promised to enable him to overcome : who has said, “In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” He who overcame it in his own person, is daily engaged in overcoming it in the person of every one, even of the weakest and the frailest of his believing and obeying people : and not one of you whom I now address, if you are believing with a child-like dependence. that “He is

faithful who has promised," and are following on to know the Lord, shall ultimately fall short of his great salvation.

"After these things God did tempt Abraham." To the youthful inquirer here is an apparent difficulty at the very threshold, and he naturally and fearfully asks, "If God become my tempter, how can I escape?" St. James, however, has plainly declared that this alarm is groundless: "Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God, for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man;" "but every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lusts and enticed." Now this cannot be said of Abraham in the example we are about to consider; therefore it is clear that in this acceptance of the word he was not tempted; all then that is intended by the expression may be seen from the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, where we read, "By faith Abraham, when he was TRIED, offered up Isaac;" he was therefore tried by the Almighty, not to satisfy him "to whom all hearts are open, and from whom no secrets are hid," but to demonstrate to the church of God, throughout all ages, the strength of Abraham's faith, and the reality of his devotedness to the Most High; to leave a lesson upon record which should be valuable to every future generation of believers, and which, by God's grace, will not be without its efficacy, even at the present hour, to you or to myself.

That we may be prepared duly to estimate this most severe and urgent trial, we must remember Abraham's peculiar circumstances. He had been promised, and that at a time when both himself and his wife were childless, and in extreme old age, that he should become the father of a nation countless as the sands, and as the stars of heaven for multitude; and what was a still higher blessing, and a far nobler object to rest the fulness of his joy upon, that the promised seed of the woman which was to bruise the serpent's head, should spring from his loins, that in him all nations should be blessed. When the fulfilment of this prophecy had become impossible to mortal apprehension, Isaac, the promised son, was born, and all the

doubts of Abraham were destroyed, and all his expectations realized. This then was the situation of the patriarch at the time of which we speak ; a state of happiness deriving its strongest feelings of delight and joy from the one single possession, and the astonishing anticipations involved in it, which it appeared to be the object of the present command of the Most High to frustrate and to dissipate for ever. "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of." Nothing that could agonize the heart of him to whom it came was omitted in that dreadful sentence ; "thy son," "thine only son :—" "Isaac," that very name of happiness and joy is recalled to the bleeding heart of the father—"Isaac, whom thou lovest," even him must thou sacrifice ; him whom the expecting patriarch had been taught by God himself to view as the first link of that mighty chain which was to terminate in blessings innumerable and incalculable for the whole human race. How plausibly might he who had pleaded so powerfully with God in behalf of the righteous in Sodom, "Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?—that be far from thee," have now argued in behalf of his guiltless child, "Wilt thou shed the innocent blood?—that be still farther from thee." But it was the direct word of the Almighty which required it, and this was sufficient to overrule every objection, and to silence every complaint.

My brethren, would you desire to form some little estimate of the reality and the strength of your own dependence upon God?—Then place yourself for a moment in a similar situation to that of the patriarch. Think for an instant of that person, of that object which you love the dearest, or regard the most devotedly upon earth : now let the breath of the destroying angel pass upon it, and behold it, like Jonah's gourd, lie withering at your feet—its beauty gone, its loveliness departed, every thing that engaged your thoughts and influenced your affections, for ever passed away, and the earth speedily about

to close over all that earth holds dear to you. Could you receive such a visitation as this, I do not say without a tear, but without a murmur, from the hands of your heavenly Father? Could you say with the Shunamite of old, in answer to the prophet's message, "Is it well with thy child?" that child which had just expired in her arms, could you reply with her, "It is well?" Could you say with holy Job, "The Lord giveth and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord?" This is a portion of faith's most difficult work, to be "patient in tribulation," resigned, gratefully resigned to the will of God; and yet it has been achieved by thousands, must be achieved by you, ere "patience shall have had her perfect work," and your will have been brought into some blessed degree of conformity to the divine will. The most valuable of God's gifts, as well as the dearest of your own delights and gratifications, must all be held as Isaac in his father's arms, ready to be laid, and at a single bidding to be sacrificed, upon the altar of your God.

Continuing the history, we read:—"Abraham rose up early in the morning and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for a burnt-offering, and rose up and went to the place of which God had told him." How valuable an instance of the immediate actings of a true and lively faith! The command was sent during the night, and it was obeyed early "in the morning." There was no doubtful question of its reality or its obligation; there was no guilty "communing with flesh and blood:" even Sarah was most probably not informed of it, lest her affections should be too strong for the patriarch's faith. Observe the importance of this example, my brethren, in innumerable instances in your own Christian course. Do you, for instance, find one line of conduct clearly reprobated, and another as clearly recommended by the inspired word of our God? then resolve at once by his grace to forsake that which He condemns, and to follow that which He commands. Do not adopt that too common worldly policy of carrying your scruples to

those who, you have reason to believe, will counsel you to disregard them; this is dealing dishonestly with God, with the conviction which his Spirit has implanted, and with your own souls. Be bold in your obedience. Be prompt in following the suggestions of an enlightened conscience, for they are emanations from the Spirit of God, and if you delay, the consequence generally is, that the Spirit is quenched and the heart is hardened; and who shall promise you that these blessed, these invaluable strivings with you shall ever return? In this, as in every other portion of your Christian life, “whatever your hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.” For, alas! in how many instances has the delay of a single day in acting faith upon the promises, or obeying the commandment of God, or accepting the offers of a Saviour, involved the loss of a boundless eternity!

Although Abraham was thus called upon to resolve instantly, the severity of the trial was unspeakably increased by the three days’ journey between its commencement and its fulfilment. It was on the third day of this long and painful travel, and when approaching nearly to its conclusion, that Isaac asked the affecting question which produced the answer of the text; for we read that while he was accompanying Abraham and carrying the wood for the altar, he said, “Behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?” How keenly must this inquiry have put the faith of Abraham to the test? “If,” as Bishop Hall beautifully remarks,* “if Abraham’s heart could have known how to relent, that question of his dear, innocent, and religious son, had melted it into compassion. ‘My father, behold the fire and the wood, but where is the sacrifice?’ I know not whether that word, ‘my father,’ did not strike Abraham as deep as the knife of Abraham could strike his son; yet doth he not so much as think, still he persists and conceals, and, where he meant not, prophecies, ‘My son, God will provide a lamb for the burnt-offering.’”

In proceeding with the narrative, we read in the 9th verse,

* Bishop Hall’s Works, p. 14, fol.

“And they came to the place which God had told him of, and Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order ; and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar upon the wood. And Abraham stretched forth his hand and took the knife to slay his son.” Here was the completion of Abraham’s obedience and of his faith ; any thing short of this, and all would have been unavailing ; this last, this agonizing moment, when the knife was taken and the hand outstretched to strike, consummated the trial and bequeathed the faith of Abraham to the church of God as the least imperfect model which mere mortality has ever offered it. Then, and not till then, did the Almighty interfere : then did Abraham hear those blessed words, “Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him, for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing that thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me. And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns : and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up in the stead of his son.”

Thus, my brethren, it was demonstrated that the faith and trust of Abraham were not ill-founded ; he trusted in God that he would provide, and God did provide at the very moment when human aid, and human forethought, and human power, were utterly incompetent and unavailable. Rightly, therefore, did he name that place “Jehovah Jireh :” “The Lord will provide,” or, “In the mount the Lord shall be seen.” In the hour of our extremest difficulty the Lord shall appear for me. How astonishing are the ways of God, and his works past finding out ! Never does the Lord make bare his arm with such merciful and wonderful effect as when the arm of flesh faileth. Thus has it ever been ; with Joseph and with Gideon, and with Noah, and with Daniel, and with Job, and with all the believers and saints of old ; and thus it is even now according to that most true proverb, “Man’s extremity is God’s opportunity.” This is not a matter of mere faith ; it is to many of you a matter of positive and frequent experience.

In the day of sorrow have you not been comforted and supported by the power and presence of God, when no mortal comforter could alleviate your distresses? On the bed of sickness, when every hope has vanished, when friends and relatives have begun to speak of you rather as those who have been, than those who are; when the efforts of science were at an end, and her most skilful followers had no counsel to offer, then has he thought that "God will provide," brought peace and consolation to your hearts; then has the good Physician manifested his power and love, and more than fulfilled your most anxious expectation, and shown that "what is impossible with man is possible with God." And as in temporal, so in spiritual difficulties, the Lord has indeed provided abundantly above all that you are able to ask or think. Have you never felt so oppressed with the burden of sin that you knew not where to look, or whither to fly for refuge—life has become irksome and the thoughts of eternity terrible? Here again the Lord has provided, and by leading you to the knowledge of a merciful and tender Redeemer, he has restored a peace to your bosom of which neither Satan nor the world shall ever permanently deprive you.

What then ought to be the effect of these repeated interferences of divine mercy in your behalf? Surely to teach you never to doubt, never to despair, never to despond. If you are visited with the severest trials, to feel assured that they are as much the fruits of your heavenly Father's love, as his more obvious blessings. If you are called to give up your dearest possession, the wife of your bosom, the children of your love, to be content, even amidst nature's keenest sufferings, to kiss the rod, and him who appointed it. If you are called away from them instead of them from you, while you behold those around your bed who will soon be unprotected and helpless orphans, still even in this darkest hour of nature's wo, to remember with confidence, "God will provide," and to trust implicitly to Him who said, "Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them alive: and let the widows trust in me."

So far, then, from these being the moments to doubt the love or tenderness of your heavenly Father, these are the times when they shine with the most resplendent lustre. But why is it that God loves thus to appear in your most urgent need, and at your most pressing extremity? It is that you who are really his children may learn not to limit your view of his infinite power and mercy to what the eye of reason can discern in present appearances, or even to what the eye of faith can distinguish in God's recorded promises. He is anxious that you should trust him far, far beyond all that can be brought within the scope of the most extended vision; that you may know that you possess a resource more abundant, a fountain of good whose waters stand more deep and flow more widely than either reason, or even faith itself can fathom, in the ALL-SUFFICIENCY of God. When every particular attribute of God fails you, when you are driven to such utter extremity that the panting soul cannot venture to believe that the love of God, or the forbearance of God, or the faithfulness of God is sufficient to reach his case; then does the ALL-SUFFICIENCY of God, in whom you trust, stand out in letters of light, which even the closing eye can read, and the fainting heart can dwell upon; then can you still hope, still struggle on, still feel assured that He who has been able and willing to provide for you in time, is as able and as willing to provide for you in eternity.

My Christian brethren, strive to appreciate this blessed view of the all-sufficiency of Him in whom you have believed. Delightful as it is in our emergencies to apply the express promises of God, and they are "exceeding great and precious," to our souls, there is something more delightful in this which embraces *all* promises. Many have known the time—you whom I address may know it—when the languid frame and the baffled spirit are incapable of recalling a single definite declaration, a single promise, with sufficient distinctness of apprehension, to rest the troubled soul upon. Oh! at such an hour how blessed is the thought that you have to deal with an ALL-SUFFICIENT Comforter,—an ALL-SUFFICIENT Saviour,—an

ALL-SUFFICIENT God! In the application of a particular promise of God you may be mistaken; in this simple dependence upon his all-sufficiency you never can. 'Therefore, in your extremest difficulties, and troubles, and trials, cast yourself in the full assurance of faith upon this infinite ocean, and you are safe. 'To adopt the beautiful language of an old divine, "If we could in all our trials lay ourselves down in the arms of the Almighty, his all-sufficiency in power and goodness, how much of the haven should we have in our voyage, how much of home in our pilgrimage, how much of heaven in this wretched earth! Friends, throw away your staves, break the arm of flesh, lie down here quietly in every dispensation, and you shall see the salvation of God."

LECTURE XII.

GENESIS XXV. 8.

"Then Abraham gave up the ghost, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years; and was gathered to his people."

WE this morning arrive at the conclusion of the history in which we have now for some time past been engaged, and desire to offer our sincere and hearty thanksgivings to Almighty God for such a measure of divine assistance as He has been mercifully pleased to supply. The closing years of life are usually not unaccompanied by warnings or by trials. The companions of our youth, the friends of our maturer age, the near connexions who have gladdened life, and the beloved relatives who have endeared it, fall around us, and they who live to approach the scriptural limit of the days of the years of man, often find themselves, even among the thickest throngs of earth, solitary and deserted, their contemporaries removed, while they themselves remain as the "shaking of the olive-tree, or the gleanings of grapes when the vintage is done."

The patriarch who forms the subject of our history, was not exempted from those trials which mingle in the common lot of all mortality. At the opening of the 23d chapter, we read of the death of his beloved wife Sarah, with whom he had enjoyed a remarkable degree of peace and happiness, during a longer period than that of which a whole life, at the present day, usually consists. Yet, long as this delightful relationship had been permitted to continue, it was now drawn to a close, and Sarah was removed to that blessed world, "where they neither marry, nor are given in marriage." There is something in the breaking of this tie more affecting perhaps to the human heart than in the disruption of any other which unites us to our fellow-pilgrims in our passage through this world of sorrow; perhaps because the tie itself, when existing between the children of God, is the sweetest and most valuable, as well as the most ancient which God has appointed in the world; having been, as our church truly declares, "instituted of God in the time of man's innocency," before he had been ruined by transgression, and debased by sin; "signifying unto us the mystical union between Christ and his church," a peculiarly beautiful feature in the marriage tie, and which gives it a remarkable precedence over all others.

Abraham had, by the good providence of God, enjoyed this state under its most auspicious aspect, and deeply indeed does he appear to have felt its termination: for we are told, and it is the only instance in which the mourning for a wife is recorded in the history of the patriarchs, that he came "to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her." Sarah is always spoken of in Scripture, as the pattern of conjugal fidelity and love; her example is held forth by the apostle as the highest model for Christian women, and the title of her "daughters," as their most honourable distinction. The very fact, that so few of the incidents of her history are recorded, speak strongly in her favour, for there is little in the even tenor of female life, when that life is passed in the unobtrusive and noiseless path of devotedness to God, and in the peaceful round of domestic

duties, which can, or ought to form the subject of the chronicler. The very privacy of the Christian graces, manifested in such a walk and conversation, endears them the more to the few who have the opportunity of intimately knowing their value, and daily and hourly appreciating their loveliness and worth.

To you, my brethren, who are at present living in the enjoyment of that great blessing, for the deprivation of which Abraham was now called to "mourn and to weep," viz., a truly godly union, allow me to offer a few words of exhortation. Although you may live together long, and happily, and uninterruptedly, the time must arrive when you shall part: the day must come when you shall separate, though it be for a time, from all whom you have loved and cherished here below: let me then urge you so to live in the exercise of all the daily and hourly duties of that important and valuable relationship, as you will, upon that parting day, desire that you had lived. When the companion of years of trial, or of years of happiness is taken from you, every action and every incident of your married life will pass before you; trifles forgotten now, will be well remembered then; every unkind word, or ungenerous thought, or hasty and irritable expression, will return upon your mind, and you will "write bitter things" against yourself for every deed which partook, however transiently, of unkindly feeling, or however slightly of want of affectionate tenderness and love. There will be pangs sufficiently deep, and piercing, and heart-rending at that hour, without these evil additions. Be warned, therefore, now, while warnings may be useful, to live as they should live who are partakers of the same hope, of "the mind which was in Christ Jesus," of "the communion of the Holy Ghost."

Endeavour to enjoy as much of spiritual intercourse together—The Lord's house, the Lord's word, the Lord's supper, private reading and prayer—as your time and opportunity will permit. Nothing will, through divine grace, tend so much to hallow the flame of wedded love, as to rekindle it daily at the altar of your God. Let "the love of Christ constrain you,"

not merely in the important affairs of life, but in all its thousand lesser communings, that your daily intercourse may be pure, peaceable, gentle ; that however the storm may rage abroad, there may be a holy calm at home, which, like the still water in some secure and sheltered anchorage, remains the very picture of repose, while all beyond is hurricane and storm. Remember that the time is hastening on, when it will be too late to recall what is past, or to compensate for former neglects by future attention ; the time when, however holily and happily you may have lived together, however sure and certain your matured hope may be of a re-union on the morning of the resurrection, you will be called, like Abraham, to “mourn and weep” for the departed here below ;—again, then, I say, be not preparing poison for the barbed arrows of that hour of darkness. Live as those who are to part, that so you may part as those who are to live together throughout eternity.

‘The inspired historian having recorded Abraham’s grief for Sarah, continues, “and Abraham stood up from before his dead,” having probably been prostrated from the extremity of his anguish, “and spake unto the sons of Heth, saying, I am a stranger and a sojourner with you ; give me a possession of a burying-place with you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight.” He was unwilling to sorrow as one without hope, and therefore having indulged his grief, as a Christian may and ought to indulge it, for we must not “despise the chastenings of the Lord,” his next act was to obtain a burying-place. How affecting is the consideration !—We have now been tracing the history of Abraham during one hundred years, throughout the greater portion of which, the promise of God was pledged to him, that all the land of Canaan should be his, and here we find him, at the close of a long and toilsome life, obtaining his first inheritance in it, and that a sepulchre for his wife !

How often does the Almighty in his providence, render the very possession which we have laboured for with the greatest perseverance, looked to with the deepest anxiety, and expected with the most joyous anticipations, the grave of all our hopes,

and all our earthly happiness ! Blessed is the man who at such a crisis can say, “ Even so, Father, for so it seemeth good in thy sight ! ”

Abraham’s confession, true at all times, was peculiarly striking and true, when he thus uttered it, at the grave of Sarah : “ I am a stranger, and a sojourner with you.” Never do we feel such full conviction of this great truth, never do we feel the ties which bind us down to earth so loosened, so nearly rent asunder, as when we stand by the grave of those we love. However at other and happier times we forget the poor frail tenure by which we hold this earthly tabernacle, we are strongly impressed with its conviction then. We then, indeed, “ know the heart of a stranger,” and wonder that we have ever felt domesticated here on earth, where there is so much of sin, so much of suffering, so little of stability and peace. Would that we could carry the constant conviction of the same great truth with us into all the daily business of life ; how little influence would its trials and disappointments possess over us, how much internal peace would it bestow, if we could really feel that these things might be grievous to a resident, or a native, but that we are “ strangers and pilgrims,” and shall soon amid the comforts of our Father’s house, smile at all these little disquietudes of the way.

The whole transaction of Abraham’s honourable and high-minded purchase of the sepulchre, which is related in the remainder of the chapter, is a beautiful specimen of patriarchal times and patriarchal simplicity. But we hasten to the close of the history. There is, however, yet one circumstance of importance which marked the declining years of the pious patriarch, and is too beautifully told in the book of inspiration to be related in any other language but its own. “ And Abraham was old and well stricken in age, and the Lord had blessed Abraham in all things. And Abraham said unto his eldest servant of his house, that ruled over all that he had, Put I pray thee thy hand under my thigh : and I will make thee swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that thou

shalt not take a wife unto my son of the daughters of the Canaanites among whom I dwell ; but thou shalt go into my country and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son Isaac. And the servant said, Peradventure the woman will not be willing to follow me unto this land, must I needs bring thy son again unto the land from whence thou camest ? And Abraham said unto him, Beware thou that thou bring not my son thither again. The Lord God of heaven, which took me from my father's house and from the land of my kindred, and which spake unto me, and that sware unto me saying, Unto thy seed will I give this land ; he shall send his angel before thee, and thou shalt take a wife unto my son from thence : and if the woman will not be willing to follow thee, then thou shalt be clear from this my oath, only bring not my son thither again. And the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master, and sware unto him concerning that matter." With the remainder of the story we have at the present no concern, for it belongs to the history of Isaac ; but of this the last great transaction in the life of Abraham, the last words of his which have been bequeathed to the church of God, it is impossible not to speak.

How striking is the manner in which this pious parent deprecates the probability of his son either forming an ungodly connexion, or returning to the land of idolatry from which he had himself been called. What would all the wealth of Canaan have profited for a dowry, if the bride should bring with her the example, and the sin, and the curse of Canaan ? What would all that God had done for him during his own life, by so remarkable and merciful a train of providences, and all that He had promised to him in the glorious future, have availed, if the beloved Isaac should fall back into the darkness of those who know not God ? How earnestly does he impress upon the mind of his faithful servant the most anxious solicitude upon this important point ! "BEWARE THOU THAT THOU BRING NOT MY SON THITHER AGAIN." Twice is this most emphatically repeated in these short directions : the very last words of

Abraham which the Spirit of God has recorded are the reiteration of this solemn counsel, "ONLY BRING NOT MY SON THITHER AGAIN."

You, my brethren, who are parents, and whom it has pleased God, by his sovereign grace, to gather out of the world of the ungodly, let me urge you to inquire, are you evincing the same holy anxiety with regard to your children? Is it your daily effort, as well as your constant prayer, that they may not be unnecessarily exposed to the temptations of a world from which you have yourselves in some degree escaped? Alas! even among religious parents, how much inconsistency do we see upon this point! How often are their children permitted to mingle in a society, to partake of pleasures, to visit scenes, from which they themselves would shrink! How often; for the questionable purpose of forming what are denominated good connexions, are they sent to places of education, where the wise man's declaration, that "the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom," is exactly reversed, and every species of wisdom inculcated, while the fear of God is left to be taught at some future time and at some other place! Christian mothers, be not too backward in declaring your real feelings upon these subjects. If the Spirit of God have taught you to see the guilt and danger of thus exposing the young minds of your dear children to such fearful contaminations, you cannot discharge your own consciencies, you cannot clear your own souls, without earnestly and prayerfully endeavouring to rescue them. If you fail, after having, in humble dependence upon divine strength, made the attempt, you may then take comfort from the reflection, that "the grace of God is not bound," but, sought by a mother's prayers, will accompany your children into the furnace, and bring them uninjured from its flames. But you can take no comfort from this thought, if you stand faithlessly by, and suffer them to be placed there without one resisting word, one affectionate entreaty, one fervent prayer. You do not know, until you have made the effort, how often, like Jacob of old, you will have power with God, and he will enable you

to prevail. If one of your little ones be missing on the great day of account, how will you acquit yourselves, if every plea have not now been urged, every entreaty used, every effort made to keep them from the snares of the destroyer?

The last scene of Abraham's life, at which we have now arrived, is thus briefly narrated by the inspired historian. "These are the days of the years of Abraham's life which he lived, one hundred, threescore, and fifteen years. Then Abraham gave up the ghost, and died in a good old age, an old man and full of years, and was gathered to his people. And his sons, Isaac and Ishmael, buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron; the field which Abraham purchased of the sons of Heth: there was Abraham buried, and Sarah his wife."

One hundred and seventy-five years in duration, therefore, was the life of Abraham; one hundred years of which he had spent as a stranger in a strange land. How little is there in the most prosperous life, when viewed from its close, to form the subject of a moment's envy! Abraham's chiefest happiness was this—not that he was favoured with a remarkable abundance of this world's goods, and with an unusual term of years to enjoy it, but, as the apostle says, that "he was called the friend of God." How blessed then is the consideration, that although neither the riches nor the years of Abraham are within your reach, this his highest honour and his noblest title, is offered as freely to the poorest and lowliest among you, as to the patriarch himself! Would you also be the friend of God, then remember the words of inspiration—"Know ye, that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham; so then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham," *i. e.* be partakers of the same blessed faith, believers, loving, obedient believers, in the same Saviour, and you shall not only inherit the same title, but the same eternity.

Doubtless it would have been most gratifying, had the Spirit of God thought good to have handed down to us some longer memorial of the death of the eminent and far-famed subject of

our history ; most instructive would it have been to have stood in imagination by the side of his dying bed, and to have heard those assurances which he doubtless gave to his beloved son, of the mercy and faithfulness of Him in whom he had believed, who had led him through the mazes of so long a pilgrimage with so much of peacefulness and comfort. Or if this had been denied us, it would have been some little compensation to have overheard, as it were, but a broken sentence, as in the case of Jacob, of those secret communings which were passing, in the very hours of nature's dissolution, between God and his soul, "I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord." Nothing of this, however, has been vouchsafed in the instance before us, and except for the purpose of our gratification, nothing of this was needed. After such a life of faith and holiness, there is small need of inquiring what was the death. We know that it could not have been otherwise than full of peace and hope. It is sufficient that the inspired historian tells us, "He was gathered to his people;" not as regarded the body, for, with the exception of Sarah, Abraham's "people" were at Charran, while his remains were deposited in the land of Canaan ; but he was gathered to his people when his spirit ascended to those realms whither all the believing people of all preceding ages, who had died in the same faith, and been rendered meet for the same inheritance, had taken up their blissful abode.

Yes, my brethren, it is a solemn consideration, not to be too hastily dismissed, that the day of death will be to all of us the day of "gathering to our people : " the scoffer, to the scoffers, the ungodly to the godless, the profane to the profane, according to our Lord's directions in his well-known parable of the tares and the wheat, "Bind them in BUNDLES to burn them." While on the other hand, the believer will be gathered into the company of believers, and will sit down with the children of God for ever. Remember, then, in choosing your friends and your associates here, that you are choosing them for eternity, and that death is merely the signal for gathering you to them, to part no more.

If the word of God be silent upon the particulars of Abraham's death, it is—and this is almost the only recorded instance—singularly communicative upon what happened after death; for we find the Almighty declaring to Moses at the burning bush, more than three hundred years after, “I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob;” and our Lord's own comment upon this is, “He is not the God of the dead, but of the living;” while in the only parable which has ever drawn aside the veil from the unseen world, the father of the faithful is represented to us as enjoying the fulness of pleasure at God's right hand; while, to be “in Abraham's bosom,” is the language by which our Lord expresses the highest degree of heavenly blessedness and everlasting joy.

May we, my beloved brethren, be daily ripening for that coming hour and that blessed inheritance! May we be ready to confess and to feel with Abraham, that we are “strangers and pilgrims on the earth,” “desiring a better country, even an heavenly!” Then will God not be ashamed to be called our God; then, when our “heart and our flesh fail us, will God be the strength of our heart and our portion for ever.”

LECTURES

ON THE

HISTORY OF JACOB.

LECTURE I.

GENESIS XXV. 27.

“ Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents.”

THERE are few subjects which so readily and so universally attract the attention of those to whom they are presented, as Biography. In general history we read of the rise and fall of nations, of the triumphs of conquerors, and the intrigues of courtiers ; but all these things pass before us in such rapid succession, and are so totally irrelevant to our situations and conditions, that they seldom affect deeply the heart, or influence the life of the reader. Very different is the case when an individual, moving in the same sphere, and subject to the same trials as ourselves, is detached from the general group, and faithfully presented to us by the pencil of the biographer, in the interesting scenes so abundantly furnished by the vicissitudes of active life. In such instances as these, more especially when relating to the people of God, we are able almost to identify ourselves with the persons of whom we read ; we participate in their difficulties, grieve at their sorrows, rejoice at their joys ; and thus not only derive a transitory gratification, but treasure up much that is valuable for future service. Long after the history has ceased to interest us, we recollect the

conduct of the holy men of whom it spake, their obedience to the commands of their heavenly Father, their meek submission to his will, their contrite acknowledgment of their own sins and infirmities, and their continual experience of his faithfulness and love; we derive fresh strength and awakened energy in the course which we ourselves are pursuing, and are oftentimes enabled, by the remembrance of such examples, to go on our way strengthened and rejoicing.

It is with the full conviction of this truth, and in the hope that a connected narrative of the life of a faithful servant of the Most High, as recorded by the unerring pen of inspiration, may present us with many very valuable lessons in our Christian course, that I have been induced to select the eventful and instructive history of the patriarch Jacob, for the subject of the Thursday morning Lecture during the ensuing season.

The claims which this man of God possesses upon our attention, are indeed widely different from those of the generality of persons who form the subject of uninspired biography; he was neither a monarch, nor a warrior, nor a philosopher, nor one of the rich and noble of the earth, living in palaces "ceiled with cedar and painted with vermilion," but, as the language of the text informs us, "a plain man, dwelling in tents." Yet does this plain man possess more to recommend him to the notice and observation of the Christian, than all the sceptred monarchs of Pagan antiquity; and we scruple not to say, that no titles ever bestowed upon the proudest sovereign of the world, by the most fulsome of his flatterers, would bear a moment's competition with that honourable distinction which the Almighty himself bestowed upon Jacob, viz., the remarkable adoption of his name into the everlasting title of the "King of kings:" "And God said unto Moses, This is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of JACOB."

The individual of whom we are about to speak, was the son of Isaac and Rebekah, the twin brother of Esau, the child of many prayers. Even before his birth great things had been

predicted of him by the Spirit of the Lord ; that although the younger born, he should have the dominion ; that he should be the progenitor of a great and powerful nation, and that they who sprang from his loins should be paramount to all the descendants of his elder brother ; that, as St. Paul explains it, he should be in his own person peculiarly the object of the love of God, and that his descendants should be an elect people, chosen of God, unto whom should be “ committed the oracles of God,” and of whom, as concerning the flesh, the Lord Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah, should come.

These are, indeed, most lofty claims upon our attention and respect, and you will probably approach the subject before us, if not with overweening anticipations of the rank and splendour, at least with high expectations of the perfect holiness and purity, of him, of whom we speak. Alas ! the perfection of these qualities belongs not to the sons of men. It was in the Son of God alone that mankind have ever seen perfection arrayed in human form : it was the Lord Jesus Christ alone who could be truly called “ holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners.” We are indeed about to speak of one who was eminently a man of God, of one upon whom the God of love had set his seal, whose “ name was written in heaven ;” but of one, let it be remembered, who was also a descendant of fallen Adam, an inheritor of a corrupt nature and a deceitful heart—in fact, of one like ourselves, a *sinner* !

To say more is unnecessary—to say less would be both unwise and untrue ; for it is one of the peculiar beauties of scriptural narrative, that no veil is ever drawn across the frailties or the sins of those whom it describes ; there is no flattery, and there is no detraction ; we have the whole man faithfully placed before us, with all those grievous inequalities of temper, life, and conversation, which are the inevitable results of the flesh for ever “ lusting against the Spirit ;” his piety and virtues distinctly portrayed that they may be imitated, his infirmities and errors as candidly avowed that they may be shunned. Let us then entreat the guidance of the Holy Spirit of our God,

that both these invaluable ends may be answered in the narrative we have selected; that, while witnessing in the course of our inquiries the occasional imperfections in the life of this holy man, we may be led to acknowledge and deplore their far greater prevalency in our own; and that, while tracing the remarkable evidence of his entire dependence upon God, and faithfulness in the promised Messiah, we may seek for a more lively and influential faith in that great descendant of Jacob, in whom "all nations of the earth are blessed."

In commencing our narrative from the very childhood of Esau and Jacob, we cannot but be struck by their early dissimilitude. Although nurtured by the same fond and affectionate parents, educated beneath the same roof, and partakers of the same advantages, they possessed little in common. The occupations and the joys of the chase formed the great business of the life of Esau, for he is in a very emphatical manner denominated by the inspired historian, "a man of the field;" entirely devoted to the pleasurable pursuits of an active life, with but little taste for the contemplative enjoyments of religious meditation and privacy: probably such an one as we should now denominate "a man of the world;" a man devotedly attached to the pursuits, intimately acquainted with the habits and manners, and not a little in love with the friendship and the pleasures of the world in which we live. Such a man was Esau, even without darkening his character by the shades which the apostle to the Hebrews has thrown over it when he denominates him "a profane person, and a fornicator:" while, as if in marked contradistinction, we have the description of the text: "Esau was a cunning hunter"—"Jacob was a plain man." "Esau was a man of the field"—"Jacob dwelling in tents." The retired and simple habits of the younger brother are here contrasted with the worldly-minded wisdom of the elder: while the mode of living adopted by Jacob, viz. "dwelling in tents," was probably an evidence of the same unworldly spirit, which is mentioned to the praise of Abraham's faith,

that "he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a *strange* country, *dwelling in tabernacles*."

The reflection which arises in our minds upon the first glance at the marked distinction between the brothers, is of this nature—strange, that in the same family, at the same time, and under the same advantages, two characters so totally opposite should have been formed. That the same treatment should have matured the cunning, worldly-minded Esau, ready to sacrifice every thing to the gratification of his pleasure and his appetite, and the retired and humble Jacob, devoted to the peaceful quiet of a religious home! A moment's glance into the world around us, a moment's reflection upon what we see, and know, and are, and we should rather ask, is it not too often thus? Do we not frequently behold, with every human mean identically the same, with the same affection, and pains, and watchfulness, lavished with the same prodigality, do we not continually witness a similar result? Do we not see in the same family, one child "a cunning hunter" after this world's pleasures and emoluments; and another a "plain man," devoted to home enjoyments and domestic pursuits, content to dwell beneath the paternal roof, and to walk humbly with his God?

The philosopher, with the book of human reason in his hand, assured that the infant mind is like an unwritten tablet, ready to receive with equal facility the good or evil with which we should inscribe it, hesitates to acknowledge the fact which all experience enforces upon him, because he is quite baffled and confounded in every attempt to reconcile so unaccountable an anomaly. The Christian turns to the book of inspiration, and finds all difficulty solved. He there discovers that the infant mind no longer resembles the unwritten tablet; but the tablet wofully blotted and deeply inscribed with Adam's guilt, and with Adam's sin: that "every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart is only evil continually:" that the grace of God, and *that* alone, can erase the natural impressions of evil, and give "the new heart and the new spirit" which are able to

know, to love, and to obey God. He turns from the book of inspiration to his own bosom, and knows by his own experience, that all he reads is true, that it is indeed God, and God alone, "who hath made him to differ from another," and that he has nothing which he has not received. That the grace of God, although it usually follows the sincere and faithful adoption of the means which his own will has appointed, is not restricted to those means ; and that although the child dedicated early to the service of God in the waters of baptism, educated consistently with those privileges, nurtured by the care and the prayers of pious parents, will, we may humbly hope, be a "partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light ;" yet that many who have been denied the advantages of that Christian education which ought to follow a Christian baptism, who have passed their infancy in neglect, their childhood in thoughtlessness, and their manhood in sin, have also been the objects of a Saviour's love ; have been checked in their mad career, been plucked as brands from the burning, and having been made "willing in the day of his power" by the effectual striving of the Spirit of God, have at his bidding accepted the free and full salvation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, "received the atonement,"^e poured forth the tear of penitence, and offered the acceptable sacrifice of a broken and contrite heart. Blessed be God, we may not doubt that there are many such as these, who having been brought through great tribulation, shall come from the east and from the west, and shall sit down with Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, ascribing all their salvation to the free and undeserved mercy of God in Christ Jesus, and uniting their joyful voices with those around the throne in the "new song," "Thou art worthy, for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood."

The character of Jacob, strikingly conscientious and devout as we shall find it in the more advanced portion of the narrative, exhibits itself under circumstances by no means advantageous or prepossessing in the opening scenes. The very first incident which succeeds the text, disposes us to think

but lightly either of his brotherly kindness or of his generosity.

Esau returns wearied with hunting, at a time when probably, (from the opening of the following chapter,) a famine was raging in the land; and seeing Jacob preparing his daily meal, he applies to him in the language of importunate necessity. "Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage, for I am faint." Jacob, instead of cheerfully availing himself of an opportunity to supply the wants of a perishing brother, seizes, with great avidity, the favourable hour for acquiring the birth-right which God had promised him, and replies, "Sell me this day thy birthright:" thus, in a moment of hunger and indifference to the promised blessing, on the one hand, and extreme anxiety to obtain it, on the other, the important bargain was concluded that was to transfer for ever to the younger son the right of primogeniture; which, at that time, conveyed the double portion of all temporalities, the especial blessing of the dying parent, and, above all, the inheritance of the covenant, which God had made with Abraham, that from his loins Christ should come.

That Esau merits our censure for treating with indifference so unspeakable a privilege, has been decided by that writer of inspiration, who has affixed for ever the epithet "profane" to the man who thus, "for one morsel of meat sold his birthright:" and that Jacob deserves our warmest commendation for earnestly desiring such a blessing, there can be no question. But here we must pause: the means by which Jacob obtained the birth-right were utterly unjustifiable, uncharitable, and unkind; and proved as much his want of faith in the Almighty to bring that to pass which God himself had promised, as it proved his want of tenderness towards his suffering brother.

If it be true that Jacob acted thus wrongfully in the circumstance which we have recounted, how shall we justify him in the very next incident in which we find him engaged—that memorable and deceitful transaction, in which, to obtain the promised blessing, he, at the instigation of his mother, imposed

upon the old age of his affectionate father, and overreached his unsuspecting brother? Is it possible that this could be the "plain man," whom we behold clothed in the garments of his elder brother, and personating the first-born? Could it be he who concealed his artifice under "the refuge of lies," not only declaring that he was Esau, and that the kid was venison, but even introducing the name and the providence of his God, to give greater colour to his abominable falsehood? "I have found it quickly, because the Lord thy God brought it to me." When we read the guilty transaction we blush—not only for the parties concerned, but for the whole human race, that such a fraud could have been suggested and carried into execution, and this not in the tents of ungodliness, but in that single family, which of all the families of the earth, alone professed the worship of the God of truth. How humbling to the holiest! how awful a warning to the most eminent of the servants of the Lord! "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall!" Let him who wilfully indulges in the smallest degree of known sin, observe how rapidly sin advances—how fearfully it darkens as it advances; how soon the lie requires to be strengthened by the oath, and the oath to be supported by the tremendous blasphemy, which would, if possible, have made it appear that God himself was a confederate in the fraud:—"The Lord thy God brought it to me." Shall we then attempt to justify that conduct in Jacob, which we should deeply condemn in ourselves, and deplore in you! God forbid! It is vain to say, that Jacob knew the blessing was already his by purchase, having acquired it when he bought the birthright, and that he was therefore only possessing himself of what he considered his unquestionable right. This is no extenuation. Isaac, his father, was a reasonable man, and a conscientious man; why not, therefore, plead the right before him, and convince him that he was about to bestow that upon Esau of which Esau had himself disposed. It is equally vain to say, that as the Almighty had consigned the blessing to Jacob, it was inalienably his own, and therefore might be obtained by any

method in his power. Isaac was a holy man, as well as a reasonable and a conscientious man; why not, therefore, recall to his recollection this perhaps long-forgotten promise, and enforce upon his conscience the duty and necessity of his compliance? Or shall we agree with those who say that "the offence of Jacob was certainly alleviated, if not entirely taken off, by the circumstance of Rebekah pledging herself to bear the blame?" No: the single injunction of the Spirit of God not to "do evil that good may come," aims a death-blow at all such casuistry as this. The sin of deceiving a man into what is right, differs little from the sin of deceiving him into what is evil. The effect of the sin, we grant, is different—the moral turpitude may be different—but the sin against God remains unaltered; while, to imagine for a moment that Rebekah's pledging herself to bear the blame, "Upon me be thy curse, my son," would extenuate the guilt of her son, is indeed a low tone of Christian morals. There is but one Being who has ever said—who can ever truly say, "Upon me be thy curse." The compassionate Saviour, the truly tender parent, the Lord Jesus Christ—he indeed, has not only made the astonishing offer, but he has proved, with his life's blood, his power and willingness to fulfil it. But to whom does he address the encouraging declaration? Not to the sinner rushing head-long into guilt—to the man of subtlety and cunning, proceeding artfully to overreach his neighbour; but to the man oppressed and borne down by a deeply contrite sense of sin committed, and sincerely lamenting with a godly sorrow, that he has grieved the Holy Spirit; that he has offended a good and merciful God; that he has contracted a load of guilt; that he has merited an everlasting curse. To him, to *you*, my brethren, if there be any here who feel the malady, and ardently desire the presence of the good Physician: to you the compassionate Saviour does indeed say, "Upon me be thy curse, my son:" I have already borne it for every penitent and believing sinner; I have borne it for you; I will "not break the bruised reed, or quench the smoking flax." "Lift up the hands which hang down, and

the feeble knees," and raise your eyes to the cross on which I hung on Calvary, and "behold the hand-writing of ordinances that was against you, blotted out and nailed" for ever there when I was "made a curse" for man; "upon me" has been "thy curse, my son," that believing in me you may obtain remission of sins, the full and perfect forgiveness which I have purchased. Come, therefore, and although you have treated me as an enemy, approach me as a friend! Come, and although you have deserved the curse, inherit the blessing! I have satisfied the justice of God which you could not satisfy. I have borne the wrath of God which you could not bear; the chastisement of your peace was upon *me*, and with my stripes you are healed.

This the fondest earthly parent cannot say. The tenderest mother, though she may have borne the shame, has never yet borne the curse for her sinning child; for "no man may deliver his brother, or make an atonement unto God for him, for it cost more to redeem their souls, so that he must let that alone for ever." We must therefore be content to leave this humiliating instance, as a blot in the character of Jacob, without apology and without excuse, only observing, that disgraceful as it was, God could forgive it, and God did forgive it, for the sake of the "Lamb slain from the fountain of the world." Blessed, for ever blessed, be the Lord, that he has thus laid help upon one that is mighty; that although he cursed the sin, he has opened a refuge for the sinner; that "the fountain for sin and uncleanness, which was unsealed on Calvary, has never since been closed, and that all who approach it may take of its healing streams, and, drawing near in penitence and faith, shall assuredly be made whole.

My beloved brethren, while the day of grace lasts, be earnest, be unceasing in seeking him whom Jacob sought, that you may partake of the forgiveness which Jacob found. "Turn you to the strong hold, ye prisoners of hope;" cling to the horns of that altar from which no penitent was ever torn: plead all your weakness, your infirmities, your need; "cast all your care upon

him who careth for you ;” and, as he has borne your curse, be assured he will also bear your sorrows and your difficulties ; and none shall “ pluck you out of his hands.” Lay upon him the burden of your sins, and receive from him the blessing of his righteousness ; and may a gracious and compassionate God not withhold from you the salvation which his own dear Son has purchased for all “ who name the name of Christ and depart from iniquity.”

LECTURE II.

GENESIS XXVIII. 5.

“ And Isaac sent away Jacob.”

“ BE sure your sin will find you out,” is one of those real truths of revelation which experience has fully justified, and which the life of Jacob will most abundantly exemplify. We have beheld him regardless of truth, of affection, of duty, determined upon obtaining, by sinister means, the blessing which the God of his father had already promised and insured to him ; we are now to trace the consequences.

Think you that the Almighty will deny Jacob the blessing which he so justly forfeited ? No ! The purposes of God were neither to be traversed by Jacob’s duplicity, nor by Isaac’s opposition. The one would, if possible, have frustrated the intentions of the Most High by his disobedience, the other would accelerate them by his craftiness ; shall then the omniscient Jehovah, to punish the waywardness of his creatures alter his own determination ? Poor erring mortals like ourselves might, indeed, have found it necessary to have acted thus ; but “ God is not a man that he should lie, neither the son of man that he should repent : hath he said, and shall he not do it ? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good ?” Yes ; God has blessed the favoured Jacob, and he shall be blessed ; but

crooked were the paths through which he sought the blessing, and sad and evil shall the days of the years of his pilgrimage be, and deep and bitter his repentance, before he beholds the faintest dawn of that sunshine, whose beams he fondly hoped would now play unceasingly upon his path.

We behold Jacob, at the opening of the present Lecture, the successful rival of his worldly-minded brother, the especially beloved son of Rebekah, and the blessed of his father—to the transient observer, a prosperous and a happy man. When shall we learn not to calculate happiness by external circumstances? When will the poor, the afflicted, and the destitute, be taught to believe that the gifts of our heavenly Father are far more equally dispensed than they imagine; that the rich are not necessarily happy, or the idle necessarily peaceful; that the heart alone knoweth its own sorrow, and that in many an envied lot some root of bitterness has been planted, felt only by its possessor, which rankles within the bosom, and fixes its inextricable thorn, while all without is blossoming?

My poorer brethren, there is but one possession which does not disappoint, which you cannot too earnestly covet, which in every state and under every circumstance, can insure happiness; and this a possession which, blessed be God, as riches cannot secure, so neither can poverty deny—a heart reconciled to God by Jesus Christ our Lord; and as the sure and certain fruits of it, a conscience at peace with God, with itself, and with all the world. Obtain this and you have obtained happiness, enduring happiness, which will not fly at the sight of poverty, or wither at the approach of death! Where are the joys of this world, of riches, pleasures, rank, of which their votaries can truly predicate the same?

It was the declaration of the wise king of Israel: “When a man’s ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.” That the way by which Jacob obtained the blessing could not please the God of truth, we may fearlessly assert. That his enemies were not at peace

with him, the narrative before us sufficiently testifies. In vain did every external circumstance shine upon Jacob, a cruel and an irreconcilable brother had resolved upon his death ; and, in the midst of prosperity, his very life became a burden to him, and he knew not how to avoid the blow which might at any unguarded moment of domestic intercourse be inflicted by the hand of so near a relative. At the suggestion, therefore, of Rebekah, and with the full consent of Isaac, Jacob resolves to forsake those tents in which he had so long resided, and where every treasured recollection spoke of a father's piety and a mother's love. A happy, because a holy home, had long been his ; but he was now to leave it. He was to enter upon a world of which, by experience, he knew but little, and to whose inhabitants his high and hallowed expectations, aye, even the God whom he served, and the heaven to which he aspired, were strangers ; from whom therefore he could hope for little, either of sympathy or regard.

You, who know by experience the bitter feeling of leaving for the first time, the roof under which you have long been partakers of every blessing, where kindnesses have been bestowed abundantly, and, at that season when kindness makes the deepest and most durable impression, where your first lisping petitions were offered at the throne of grace, and your earliest impressions of good received, will not think lightly of the sacrifice for which Jacob was now called upon.

This was the first-fruits of the act of faithlessness in which he had borne so distressing a part. His "sin had already found him out," and, as its obvious and immediate consequences, he was sent forth a wanderer and an alien from that very country, his anxiety to obtain which had formed one motive for his late duplicity.

It must have been a bitter hour for Jacob when he thus quitted the tents of Isaac ; his destination, by the desire of his parents, was Haran, the residence of Laban, his mother's brother, at a distance of more than four hundred miles ; a long and wearisome journey at any time and under the happiest circumstances,

but to Jacob, friendless and companionless, a penitent and solitary pilgrim, it must have been an undertaking of no common difficulty and no ordinary danger.

Fearful as it was however, Jacob, confiding in the promised blessing of his God, hesitates not to undertake it; and as he himself informs us, (in a subsequent part of his history,) with only his staff in his hand, he sets forth upon his solitary journey. It was at the close of the first day's travel, when, wearied with the long and toilsome march of forty miles beneath an eastern sun, "he lighted upon a certain place," says the historian, "and tarried there all night," the heavens his canopy and the stones his pillow. To a mind occupied as Jacob's must have been with the fond recollections of home, with the desolating sense of his own utter solitariness and helplessness, and, above all, with compunctious visitings for the transgressions of which he had been so lately guilty, *that* sunset must have been a melancholy hour. Often must the sad reflection have crossed his bosom: "why am I here?" and as often must conscience have returned the humiliating answer, "because thy sin has found thee out;" and while this godly sorrow was thus working repentance unto salvation, many a pang must have been imparted by feelings of doubt and uncertainty, whether he were indeed under the special guidance of the Most High, the object of his pardoning love, and of his providential care. It was during these hours of darkness that God was preparing a message of peace and love for his benighted soul. The shades of evening had now closed thickly around his pillow, when he was favoured with the following remarkable vision.

"He dreamed, and behold a ladder set upon the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and, behold, the angels of God ascending and descending on it, and, behold, the Lord stood above it." A vision indeed, most strikingly adapted to Jacob's present state of mind, and highly calculated to impart confidence and comfort; teaching him in no ambiguous manner, that poor and of little value as he might be in his own estimation, he was the object of the immediate guardianship

and watchfulness of those angelic spirits who are “sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation;” and that widely separated as the heavens are from the earth, the connexion between them is most intimate and indissoluble; that wherever God has a people, whether the inhabitants of the populous city, or the wanderers of the cheerless desert, they are equally the objects of the care and love of their heavenly Father; and, that so especial is the providence of God, that one poor traveller, sleeping upon a pillow of stones, appears to exercise as much of the thoughtfulness and consideration of the King of kings as the highest monarch upon earth. To Jacob such assurances, at such a time, must have been invaluable, for they convinced him that, deeply as his past conduct had offended God, the Lord had not cast away his servant; that God was willing to receive his repentant child, and, for the sake of the everlasting covenant, to pardon and accept him.

My Christian brethren, many centuries have rolled away since Jacob lay upon his bed of earth, and beheld this cheering vision descending from that fount of light which no man may approach unto; yet can we not read it at the present hour without feeling that it wonderfully and sweetly harmonizes with our own experience, and with the dealings of our heavenly Father with ourselves. Although not the travellers of a desert, we are (and would that we still more strongly felt ourselves to be!) but strangers and pilgrims here seeking a better country, even an heavenly one. And of what nature are the manifestations with which our merciful Father favours us at the outset of our heavenward journey? Are they not similar to this of Jacob? Does He not, when, with a sense of our own weakness, we are tempted to despond at the fearful separation which sin has made between God and us, when our conscience is writing bitter things against us, and every other feeling is absorbed in the overwhelming sense of our own helplessness and sin; does He not, during those hours of darkness, prepare a message of love for our souls? does He not assure us that there is pardon for the penitent; peace for the humbled and

believing sinner ; that “ there is now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus ? ” Does He not open our eyes to behold the ladder set upon the earth, the top reaching to heaven—that ever-blessed mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ—the only connecting link between earth and heaven, between man and God ; the base of the ladder his human nature visible here on earth, the top of the ladder his divine nature, the immutable Godhead in heaven ? and are not the messages of kindness, and reconciliation, and everlasting blessedness, with which we are favoured, and every one of which passes through this only appointed way, the angels descending to us, while our own prayers must ascend to God by the same ladder, must be offered up by faith in Jesus, and pass through *him*, “ the way, the truth, and the life,” the only intercessor with the Father ?

You, who have with Jacob sincerely deplored your own infirmities and sins, will rejoice with him at the supernatural aid which God has offered you. You have seen with the eye of faith, that ladder which “ flesh and blood have not revealed unto you, but your Father which is in heaven.” Every round of that ladder speaks joy, and hope, and strong consolation ; and blessed, far above all earthly blessedness, is the poorest and most destitute among you, even though your head may rest upon the earth for your pillow, if your eyes have been opened to behold, and your hearts to receive, the consolations of this heavenly vision.

By Jacob this remarkable manifestation of the especial providence and love of God appears to have been most gratefully received and fully appreciated ; for his waking declaration was, “ Surely the Lord is in this place.” Here, even here, I have found a protecting God ; I am as much the object of his parental regard and continual watchfulness upon the sands of the desert, as in the tents of Isaac ; “ this is none other but the house of God, this is the gate of heaven.” These impressions, so powerfully imparted by the heavenly vision, were as fully corroborated by the heavenly voice ; “ For the Lord stood above the ladder, and said, I am the Lord God of Abraham

thy father, and the God of Isaac," and then repeating the original promise of the land, continued, "I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest,...for I will not leave thee until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of."

After such assurances as these, "the desert," to the eyes of the awakened Jacob, must have "rejoiced and blossomed as the rose;" no longer would he feel himself a solitary outcast, while the God of his fathers was his companion; no longer would he be uncertain of the result of his journey, when the same God had pledged himself to continue with him unto the end.

Where is the convinced and enlightened Christian who may not sympathize in these feelings with this man of God? "Behold I am with thee," is the source of all our confidence: "greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world," is the foundation of the believer's joy. There are times, even to the most devoted Christian, when his hope burns with a more feeble light, and when he feels the corruptions of his fallen nature still unsubdued within his bosom. The faithlessness, which he trusted was a conquered enemy, raises in some new shape its hydra head, inducing him to doubt the truth or the love of the Saviour who has redeemed him; tempting him to despondency and despair; leading him to believe, after all which the free and sovereign grace of God has wrought both for him and in him, he shall still most assuredly be a cast-away. In these moments how blessed to the Christian's soul are such declarations as those with which the most high God now consoled the fainting heart of his servant, "I will not leave thee until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of:" or, as the same promises are in the writings of the New Testament reiterated to us, "He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee:" "He who hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." It is thus that when assailed by spiritual fears or despondency, you are enabled to look from yourself to Him from whom cometh your help, and

who has said, "Look unto *me* and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." This is the believer's wisdom, and strength, and happiness, "looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith;" knowing that he is faithful who has promised, and that having by his grace called you even while you were enemies, and guided you by his hand through many a weary mile of this world's wilderness, he will not desert you now that you are reconciled to him by the blood of his Son. Even should your faith fail, and you cry unto Him out of the depths into which you are beginning to sink, his hand will still be outstretched to save; and though the dark waters are passing over your soul, he will place you upon the rock which is higher than you, at whose base, although the tempest roar and the surges beat, "eternal sunshine settles round its head," where "light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart."

In pursuing the narrative, we find that Jacob, sincerely as he believed, and greatly as he rejoiced in all the promises of God, was so far from imagining that this full and unqualified declaration of protection on the part of the Most High would justify any negligence or indifference on his own, that the first act which succeeded the wonderful vision, was a solemn dedication of the place, of his property, and of himself, to the service of Jehovah. For we read, "Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for a pillow and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it, and called the name of the place Bethel."

In other words, he erected a lasting memorial to the honour and glory of that gracious Being of whose presence and favour he was now fully assured; and so highly did the Almighty estimate this evidence of his devotion, that we find him twenty years afterwards reminding Jacob of this act and of this hour, saying, "I am the God of Bethel, where thou anointedst the pillar;" a lesson to us, my Christian brethren, to set up lasting memorials of the Lord's merciful and providential dealings with ourselves.

We would then ask—has your heavenly Father, since you last assembled during this holy season in his house of prayer, visited you with many temporal and spiritual mercies? Have your worldly circumstances prospered, and has his hand been upon you for good? Have you tasted, perhaps drunk deeply, of the cup of sorrow or of sickness, and did God hear your cry, descend to your assistance, and assuage your sorrows, or give an unexpected efficacy to human means, and restore you again to those you love? Or does the retrospect of the twelve-month which is past, suggest that you have still higher blessings than these to acknowledge; that when darker shades than those which surrounded the sleeping Jacob had gathered round your soul, a merciful God enlightened your spiritual vision, and pointed out to you the only way of access to himself, and brought you near by the blood of his Son! O! if you have been partakers of these, or of any of these mercies, we trust that you have set up some memorials of them; the deeply grateful heart, the calm yet rejoicing spirit, the truly devoted life, the increased and lively faith, the subdued temper, chastened will, the consistently holy conversation,—these are the Christian's "waymarks," by which all may "take knowledge of you that you have been with Jesus."

But Jacob did not content himself with a single act of devotion, however excellent or appropriate, for we are told that "he vowed a vow unto God, saying: If God will be with me and keep me in the way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then shall the Lord be my God." The nature of this vow was equally a proof of the moderation of Jacob's desires, "asking only bread to eat and raiment to put on," and the reality of his faith in the promises which had just been vouchsafed him; the vow was in fact an echo of the promise, not intending to be merely conditional, and to say, "If God will keep me, then will I serve him," but evidently implying, *since* God has pledged himself to keep me, therefore will I devote myself wholly to his service; since God has promised

to be with me, therefore “shall the Lord be my God.” It was not, then, as has been falsely represented by the enemies of revelation, the shrewd compact of an avaricious man to bind the Deity to his interest, but the overflowing of a grateful heart anxious to bind itself to its God; that love of God, which proceeds from the conviction that he first loved us. God had revealed himself to Jacob as a pardoning God, passing by the iniquity of his penitent confiding servant, and the effect of this manifestation of undeserved mercy and love, was to unite the heart of that servant to his God for ever.

My brethren, we have endeavoured to apply the spiritual lesson taught by Jacob’s pillar, more especially to you who have passed through trouble, or sickness and sorrow; to you, then, we would also desire to apply Jacob’s *vow*.

Did your hour of trouble, your chamber of sorrow, your bed of sickness, witness no vows? Have you never, in adversity, said, “If the Lord will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on:” or in sickness, If the Lord will raise me up again; or in spiritual despondency, If the Lord will keep me in this way, that I may come to my Father’s house—the house with many mansions, “then shall the Lord be my God?” And were not your petitions heard, and the solicited blessing vouchsafed, and the hour of spiritual despondency, or of natural terror and alarm, permitted to pass away? How, then, have these vows been kept? Have they been “as a morning cloud, and as the early dew?” When the terror of the grave departed, did the resolutions of sickness depart with it? and are you now eagerly seeking the giddy bustle of the world, to brush away the few lingering remains of broken vows and frustrated intentions? Suffer, then, the present example to act as a solemn memento to your conscience; believe that the God of all your mercies, who answered your prayers, has also registered your vows, and now grieves over the neglect of them; he, of whom you once said, “Then shall the Lord be my God,” sees with a parent’s feeling that you have forgotten him, and sends this message of love to your soul, still willing to recall his wander-

ing child, still desirous of bringing you to himself. Remember those hours of affliction and of weakness ; remember what you would then have felt, could you have been assured that you should have been in this place, in your accustomed health, to-day. Twenty years after Jacob had vowed, God expressly reminded him of that vow. He is now mercifully doing the same to you ! O let it not be in vain ! Let the solemn season which is before you be employed in regaining the vantage ground upon which, by the mercy of God, you once stood ; retrace your steps, recall the feelings and the resolutions of these long past hours ; dedicate yourself anew to the service of God ; come once more to the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness, and devote “yourself, your soul and body,” to the glory of your Redeemer. Then, indeed, shall the Lord be your God, equally present to bless and comfort you in health and sickness, in sorrow and in joy, in time and in eternity ! Then shall you find, even while on earth, that “peace of God which passeth all understanding ;” and when you have departed hence, “an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom and joy of your Lord.” But if you still turn a deaf ear to him that speaketh from heaven ; if you still forget what God has done for you, and neglect what you have promised him, we would solemnly charge it upon your conscience, that this is not the last time that you shall think of your wasted resolutions and of your broken vows. You shall be reminded of them upon another day ! in another place ! by another speaker.

LECTURE III.

GENESIS XXIX. 20.

“And Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her.”

At the close of the last Lecture, we left Jacob at Bethel, where the Almighty had vouchsafed him so encouraging a vision, and where he had dedicated himself to the service of God by so remarkable a vow.

Many a weary day's journey still lay between him and the place of his destination, and much of uncertainty, and danger, and fatigue, overhung his solitary path; yet such was the influence of the blessed assurances of the divine presence and protection which he received on that first night of his pilgrimage, that he proceeded on his journey the following morning with feelings of alacrity and joy, to which he had long been a stranger.

The 29th chapter, at which we resume the history, commences by saying, “Then Jacob went on his journey.” The marginal reading is, “He lift up his feet,”—that being the more literal translation, and intending to convey the cheerfulness of heart to which we have alluded. The Jewish commentary upon the verse says, “His heart lifted up his feet;” very expressive of the buoyancy and light-heartedness with which he recommenced his travels. We may learn how widely the remainder of this long and wearisome journey differed from the first day's march, by the brevity with which the inspired historian recounts it; the four hundred miles are despatched in a single verse; for we read, “Then Jacob went on his journey, and came into the land of the people of the East.”

You, my Christian brethren, who were able to sympathize in our last Lecture with this poor traveller, in the outset of his solitary pilgrimage; who have known, by painful experience, what it is to lie down with a heart ill at peace with God; who

have been perplexed with many an anxious doubt and fear ; and, perhaps, have carried about with you, for months and years together, a spirit weighed down by a sense of sin, a heart which alone knew its own bitterness : but who have now received the same assurances which Jacob did of forgiveness, of consolation, and support, and, by the mercy of God, have been led to that gracious Redeemer who alone can bind up the heart when broken, and cheer the spirit when sorrowful, and give remission of sin, you will readily enter into the feelings with which Jacob recommenced his journey, for they are the same blessed feelings with which you yourselves are travelling. The way before you may be long and wearisome ; there may be much to humble, to harass, and distress you ; but if your feet be indeed “ shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace,” and you have for a helmet “ the hope of salvation,” we may not doubt that the consolation of Jacob will be your own, and that if your spiritual journey were hereafter to become the subject of the chronicler, it might, in most instances, be described in terms as satisfactory, though as brief as these, “ They went on their journey, and they have entered into the land.”

No sooner do we find Jacob arriving at the place of his destination, than we perceive that the same Providence which had guided him thither, is still “ about his path,” ordering and arranging all things for his future happiness. The first persons with whom he meets, are a company of shepherds, assembling with their flocks for the purpose of watering the sheep ; and while entering into conversation with them in the free and unrestrained manner natural in those unsophisticated ages of the world, divine Providence brings to the spot the very person for whom (as the Almighty had designed) the journey of Jacob had been undertaken—Rachel the daughter of Laban, his mother’s brother. No sooner did Jacob behold her, than, probably prepossessed by her appearance, for we are told that she was “ beautiful and well-favoured,” and certainly deeply touched by the merciful kindness of God in thus unexpectedly bringing his journey to a favourable issue, while he embraced her, he

“lifted up his voice and wept”—tears of bitterness for his own faithless misgivings—tears of joy, that his difficulties, were now at an end, and that the object of his mission was thus, as it appeared to him, so speedily to be obtained.

“Arise, my son, flee to Laban, my brother, to Haran, and tarry with him a *few days*, until thy brother’s fury turn away, then I will send and fetch thee from thence,” had been his mother’s parting speech. When he therefore had seen and loved Rachel, and had been brought into the house of Laban, and dwelt with him a few weeks, he must have believed that every day would be the last, and that he should soon receive the wished-for message of recall. Well spake the prophet Jeremiah, when he said, “O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.” Jacob entered the house of Laban for a few days—he remained there *twenty years*. Truly has the word of God declared, “we know not what a day may bring forth;” we know not what “shall be on the morrow.” Most kind and merciful that it is so—sin has introduced too much of misery into the daily cup which all are called upon to drink, without mingling the poison of to-morrow with the draught of to-day. It is true that there is much of sweet as well as bitter in the Christian’s cup; that if the word of God has said, “the heart knoweth his own bitterness;” it has also said, that “a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy;” that “joy and peace” are among the promised fruits of the Spirit, but alas! they are fruits which never ripen thoroughly here below; they require a brighter climate and a warmer sun to bring them to perfection: and the dearest child of God will never know their full flavour, until he partake of them in that blessed country, “where the sun shall no more go down,” and “where the Lord shall be their everlasting light:” where “the tree of life,” on which alone these fruits grow in rich profusion, “yields her fruits every month, and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.” There these blessed fruits of the Spirit will indeed be fully ripened, the sinful anxieties which a corrupt

heart will, even to the end, be continually fostering, will be removed, and the distracting sorrows which at some period or other introduce pain and misery into the bosom of the holiest of the people of God, will then be plucked out and cast away for ever.

In entering the dwelling of Laban, Jacob had entered the dwelling of a covetous man, and an idolater, who, although he had not renounced a nominal dependence upon God, had forsaken the true spiritual worship of him. In the company, and especially in the service of such a man, there was little good to be expected; and we accordingly find that after Jacob had been with him a month, Laban, under the most plausible professions of disinterestedness, secures the service of his helpless relative, by agreeing that Jacob should serve him seven years before he bestows upon him the promised Rachel. To Jacob this portion of his servitude passed happily and contentedly and was, probably, the most innocent and the least disastrous period of his life. Every thought of the difficulties of his situation, of the labours and the toils which were increasingly gathering around him, was forgotten in the one heart-engrossing feeling which possessed him; so did this sweeten every trouble, and enhance every enjoyment, that the inspired writer assures us, "Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days, for the love he had to her." No other feeling of the human mind could have so shortened and sweetened the term of that lengthened bondage. Ambition, avarice, fear, and a host of similar passions, will all make the bond-slave obedient to the beck of the hardest taskmaker, and ready to labour even in the fires for the accomplishment of its object; but there is none, save love, the master-passion of the human heart, which can enable its possessor to render not only a willing, but a happy and joyful obedience; which makes him feel every demand upon his time, his thoughts, his energies, as too small, too poor, to bestow: which induces him, when he has done all and more than all that is demanded, to feel sorrowful only that more had not been required, that he might have

borne still stronger witness to the inexhaustible feeling from which his obedience flows.

My brethren ! for what, do you imagine, the great Author of our being implanted in us so astonishing and so resistless a feeling ? To lavish it upon the poor sinful creatures by whom we are surrounded ? To waste it upon some fickle object of our fond and foolish caprice, which, like the gourd of Jonah, “ comes up in a night and perishes in a night ? ” Is this probable ; is it possible ? O no ! The whole tenor of God’s revealed word convinces us that He who made the human heart and endowed it with this extraordinary capacity, made it and endowed it expressly for himself. That every application of these all-powerful feelings which is not in complete subserviency to the one great purpose of their existence—the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord—is an act of robbery towards God. He has said, “ My son, give *me* thy heart ; ” and he must possess the whole heart, or he will reject the blemished sacrifice. All religion is intended to produce this principle of love ; a *grateful love* to God, because “ he first loved us,” and has enabled us, through the promise in his dear Son, to look forward to the “ recompense of the reward : ” and a fervent *disinterested love* of God from the knowledge of his attributes and his character revealed to us in Jesus Christ as altogether lovely. He who has given you a heart abundantly qualified to love, thus offers himself to you as the only object upon whom that feeling, infinite as are its stores, may exhaust itself without sinfulness, and without excess. Other objects may, and indeed ought to be loved, dearly, fondly, and unceasingly ; but God alone is to be loved with all the unbounded feelings of the heart. This is his language of mercy to every child of his blessed family : “ For you I have given my Son, my own and only begotten Son ; and I myself am ready to draw you to him : that you may know and receive him : though you have sinned, I do not desire your punishment ; though you have forfeited life, I have no pleasure in your death : come unto him that you may be saved ! All I ask of you is, that you should

love me with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength."

'This is the test of vital religion ; the great and palpable distinction between the man of God and the man of the world. Both may worship in the same temple—offer the same prayers—kneel at the same altar ; while the latter feels nothing, knows nothing, thinks nothing of this love to God, and the former not only loves him, but with so much sincerity and ardour, that he is able to say with the Psalmist, " Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of thee." Can we conceive a greater difference than must be perceptible to the eye of God between two such worshippers ! If there be a proof needed of the great internal change which must take place in every human heart before it is fitted for the society of heaven, and an eternal residence near the throne of the Almighty, surely an awful proof is here ; only make the subject before you one of individual, of personal inquiry, and you will confess that there is. You did not by nature love God ; perhaps you do not now love him ; then it is evident that you could not be happy in his company, that you could not rejoice to find yourself in his immediate presence. Alas ! then, you are not educating for heaven ; your feelings are not in unison with those of its inhabitants ; your heart could not rejoice, or your voice harmonize with theirs. You would feel yourself a stranger in the midst of that loved and loving multitude ; you could not unite with them in the new song ; the never-ceasing praises of their boundless love would be discord to your ears.

'Think seriously of this, I beseech you, my beloved brethren ; probe yourselves deeply to ascertain whether the religion you profess has taken root in your *affections*, the seat of all true and scriptural religion. Is the heart influenced by it ? Does it burn within you at the thoughts of these things ? or is it alive to every other theme—kindling at the name of other friends, but cold, languid, dead to the name of Jesus, and the soul-inspiring themes of God and heaven ? It is melancholy

to think how much of the semblance of spiritual life may exist, while the reality is absent. There may be a regular attendance upon all the outward duties of religion, there may be a conscientious observance of the laws and ordinances of God, and an habitual respect, and reverence, and fear of him, while there is not a single spark of heartfelt, influential *love*, sanctifying every thought, and word, and work, to the glory of God.

It was the possession of this feeling which so eminently characterized the early disciples of our Lord, which enabled them to estimate the heaviest trials, the severest persecutions, which man could invent, as "the light affliction which is but for a moment," compared with the exceeding and eternal weight of glory, which they were anticipating. It was the thought of "being with Christ, which is far better" than the happiest portion here below, that gilded all their sufferings and made them ardently long, while they patiently waited, for their summons into the presence of him of whom the apostle says, "Unto you therefore which believe *he is precious*." If you are conscious that you do not possess this love of God, seek it early and late, search for it as a hidden treasure until you find it; you cannot find it except you be at peace with God through Jesus Christ; for you cannot love even a fellow-creature because you are told, or because you think it a duty to love; you must first see something attractive in the object of love, or you must be sensible that you yourself are loved; thus is it also with regard to God. You cannot love him because the Bible commands you, or because the preacher urges you; you cannot love him until you know him as the Being full of kindness, full of mercy, which he really is; until you believe what he has himself assured you, that "God is love;" until you have a good hope through grace, that he has "blotted out as a thick cloud your transgressions, and as a cloud your sins," and beholds you with tender compassion through the Son of his love, the Lord Jesus Christ. Obtain this blissful feeling, and it will amply repay you for all the anxieties of the search. Nay, if you are even required to sow for it in tears, the harvest

will richly reward you, for you will reap in joy. Religion will no longer be a gloomy subject, or its duties a hard service; you will be called indeed to labour, but it will be a labour of love; you will be constrained to walk in the "strait and narrow way," but it will be "the love of Christ which constraineth you;" and though, like Jacob, your years of servitude may be many and your labours numerous, you will in the end, with sincerity and joy, declare, like him, that they have "seemed but a few days," for the love you have to that being for whom you laboured.

In resuming the narrative before us, we find that Jacob had still new lessons to learn in that painful and humiliating truth upon which we dwelt in our last discourse: "Be sure your sin will find you out." The seven years of servitude are, indeed, over, but Rachel, the promised reward, is still withheld. Laban, by a most wicked and abominable fraud, deceives Jacob into the marriage of Leah, the elder sister; mocking him, when the deceit had proved successful, by a reference to a custom, which there is every reason to believe, never existed, viz., that the younger daughter could not be married before the first-born. It was thus that he, who had deceived his own father, receives the punishment of his sin, by being deceived in turn by his father-in-law—thus that Jacob was to learn that the Lord will not away with the iniquities of his people; that though they "find a place for repentance," and are again accepted in the Beloved, the Almighty teaches them, as Gideon "taught the men of Succoth," by "the *thorns* and *briars*" with which he scourged them, that they have "erred and strayed from his ways like lost sheep;" that, if they will wander from the fold, although, "the good Shepherd knows his sheep," and "will leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it, and when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders rejoicing," yet they must not be surprised to be brought back wounded and lacerated, smarting from the effects of their own folly and sin.

A new term of servitude now opens upon Jacob, who, though

permitted to marry the beloved Rachel, is required to labour for his avaricious kinsman seven years longer, at the close of which we are not surprised to find him, under the divine direction, anxiously desiring to depart—"Send me away," is the language of Jacob, "that I may go unto mine own place, and to my country." Jacob had in Laban's house obtained his wives, and his children, and his cattle, and he was now in a situation to establish himself with respectability in any quarter of the land—but he remembered that this was not his promised home; that the God of his fathers had revealed to him, that the land on which he lay at Bethel, the whole land of Canaan, should be the possession of himself and of his seed for ever.

In this declaration, therefore, of Jacob, "Send me away, that I may go to my own country." there was something more than the mere longing of the natural man for the land of his nativity; we behold in it the strong and influential faith of these ancient patriarchs, believing implicitly the promises of their God, that the land, of which not an acre belonged to them, should in due time, be wholly theirs; that their seed should be as the stars of heaven, and that from their loins should spring the Saviour of the world. It was thus, that not only Abraham, but Jacob, also, "rejoiced to see Christ's day, and saw it and was glad." In looking to Canaan, they looked to heaven, which is typified, and seeing those promises afar off, "they were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth," and that they "desired a better country, that is, an heavenly."

Such is the beautiful comment of the apostle to the Hebrews, upon the faith of the patriarchs. My Christian brethren, these were the feelings which made Jacob desire, as soon as his services were finished, to be dismissed, that he might return to his country and his home. And ought not these to be supereminently the feelings of you upon whom the ends of the world are closing? Does not your daily experience, as well as the word of God, assure you that "here you have no continuing city?" Can you truly say, that you are "seeking one

to come ?” Doubtless the ties by which Jacob was bound to the land in which he had lived so long, and, in some respects, so happily, were powerful and numerous ; but all those ties were broken at the thoughts of Canaan, and the desire of being there. None of you whom I address, are without some ties which fetter you to earth ; but, while as Christians you delight yourself in them, (as the mercy of our heavenly Father permits and intended,) jealously watch lest they bind you too closely to earth,—lest they keep you too far from heaven. Beware that the gifts widen not the space between you and the Giver ! that a beloved parent, husband, or child, engross not your whole heart, and induce an overweening desire to linger in the land of your servitude. “ ‘This is not your rest,’ ” is sounded in our ears by every passing bell ; are you then striving to hold these ties so loosely, that at the word of your God, you could be content to separate them for ever ? ‘This is, indeed, no less your interest, than your duty ; for doubly painful will be the pang of separation, if it come unlooked for, and find you unprepared. Learn to think habitually of these earthly blessings, not as the gifts, but as the loans of your heavenly Father, which may be resumed at any moment that his sovereign will shall call for them ; and, to obtain these feelings, live continually as on the threshold of heaven, “ looking for, and hastening unto, the coming of the day of God,” cultivating that unworldly posture of mind, and spirituality of heart, and, above all, that love for your Redeemer, which will enable you, when (like the beloved apostle) you hear the voice of your Lord, saying, “ Surely I come quickly,” to reply with sincerity and joy, “ Even so come, Lord Jesus.” Thus, when the close of your services here on earth has arrived, and you have done the work which God has given you to do, there will be no impatient repining, no querulous desire for a little longer respite ; it will be enough for you to know, that He who has condescended to employ you has no further need of your services here below, but that “ there remaineth a rest for” you among “ the people of God,” and the language of your heart will be, in all meek-

ness and humility, "Lord, send me away, that I may go to the place and to the country" which Thou hast prepared for me, through the love of thy dear Son.

LECTURE IV.

GENESIS XXXII. 11.

"Deliver me, I pray Thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau."

ENGAGED as we have now been for some time past, in considering the important passages in the life of Jacob, we cannot help experiencing feelings of disappointment, that we have never yet beheld him in any situation, of which we could truly say, "This is happiness." We commenced his life with the prophetic assurances that God should give to Jacob "of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine;" that, cursed should be every one that cursed him, and blessed every one that blessed him; and yet, throughout the whole period of which we have hitherto spoken, although more than fourscore years had passed over him, we have found him still a dependent, enjoying, indeed, much of the protecting presence and guidance of his God, but by no means distinguished for worldly affluence or prosperity.

We are now, however, to behold him in a new character, as a wealthy man, accompanied by his wives and numerous family, surrounded by his oxen and his asses, his men-servants and his maid-servants, and returning to his own country and his own place.

If we have, in the former part of Jacob's history, had occasion to observe how little cause there is for repining, although our lot be placed among the poor and the destitute, so long as we possess a well-grounded hope that the Lord is our God, and we are his people, we shall now have equal reason to remark,

how little cause there is for exulting, although the highest worldly advantages be our own, unless accompanied by the same blessing, the continual presence, and abiding influence of our Heavenly Father, reconciled by the blood of his Son.

We learn, from the beginning of the 32d chapter, that Jacob, having entirely freed himself from Laban, and about to return to his father's house, was obliged to pass through the country of Edom, which was in the possession of his brother Esau. The last tidings which we heard of Esau, were, that deeply exasperated at the duplicity of Jacob, he had resolved to take away his life. It was to escape this peril that Jacob had been so long an alien and an outcast from the parental roof; while, therefore, we feel how striking an evidence it offers of Jacob's implicit trust in the Almighty, that, at the command of God, he should thus venture unarmed through the territories of one so hostile and so powerful as his unreconciled brother, we cannot help feeling considerable anxiety as to the manner in which he will be received. Will Esau, now that the hour of vengeance, for which he had so long waited, has arrived—will he fulfil the threatening, which has been for twenty years in abeyance, and destroy the helpless Jacob, his wives, and his little ones, and possess himself of the prey? Or will the natural sympathies of our nature be awakened within his bosom, and induce him to meet his enemy and his supplanter, as a brother and a friend?

If we, my brethren, cannot but feel some interest in the result of these inquiries, what must have been felt by Jacob? It requires but little knowledge of the human heart, to be assured that a time of intense anxiety and trial was approaching him, and that the possession of all the worldly advantages with which the Almighty had so lately blessed him, would rather tend to increase, than diminish those anxieties, by holding out only a richer booty to the sword of Esau and his followers.

During his years of servitude, doubtless Jacob had often thought—If these weary years were over—if I had but obtained Rachel for my wife, and the affluence which the Almighty has promised me for my worldly portion, how perfect would be my

happiness ; how utterly beyond the reach of any outward circumstances to affect or trouble it ? Both these desires had now been granted ; Rachel had become his wife, and the wealth of Laban had, by the remarkable interpositions of the Almighty, passed into Jacob's hands ; but where was the unruffled happiness for which he had panted ? Like the horizon, it had fled from his approach !

And is it not thus, my brethren, with many among yourselves ? Have you not often placed some wished for object before your eyes ; some darling scheme ; some eagerly anticipated connexion ; some expected aggrandizement of wealth or station, with the acquirement of which, you confidently believe, that all your desires will be fulfilled, and your worldly happiness be unspeakably promoted ? It is in vain we tell you that you will assuredly be disappointed ; that you carry an immortal soul within you which nothing infinite, nothing transitory, can fully satisfy ; this is one of those points upon which the words of the preacher are wholly inefficient. Experience will convince you, but nothing short of this can avail. If we were even able to demonstrate that it had been so in every other instance, you would still believe your own case to be an exception ; you would say, My hopes are built upon a better foundation ; I know what I am expecting ; I have well considered its incalculable advantages ; I have not entirely excluded the Almighty from my visions of future happiness, and therefore I do not fear that they should disappoint me. Alas ! you will not know until you enter upon the possession of this anticipated happiness, how little the Almighty has, in reality, been considered in these scenes of worldly bliss, and how much the pleasures of time and sense have predominated. What, then, will be the inevitable consequence ? That if you are a child of God you will assuredly experience disappointment in every enjoyment short of God himself. There will always be some trials or some alarm, meeting you (like Jacob) before the first dawn of bliss has passed away, to convince you of its insufficiency, and to prevent you from resting in it. Wherever you

propose to nestle, there your heavenly Father will plant a thorn ; until you are driven, like a bird, from spray to spray, and from leaf to leaf, and taught by painful experience, that God, and God alone, is from everlasting to everlasting the "*dwelling-place*" of his people.

But we must return to Jacob, that we may learn by his example to prepare for the trials which we cannot avert. We are told that he first sends messengers to Esau to endeavour to deprecate his resentment, and to obtain his favour, "and he commanded them, saying, 'Thus shall ye speak unto my lord Esau, Thy servant Jacob saith thus, I have sojourned with Laban and stayed there until now ; and I have oxen, and asses, and flocks, and men-servants, and women servants ; and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find grace in thy sight.'"

If the most unaffected courtesy united to the most sincere humility, could have availed to soften the heart of Esau, surely this message of kindness must have brought back an answer of affection and forgiveness : but no such effects were produced. The messengers returned to Jacob without a word of tenderness in reply ; nay, rather with intelligence which might have appalled the boldest heart—"We came to thy brother Esau, and also he cometh to meet thee, and *four hundred men with him.*" This was indeed most fearful news for Jacob ; truly it verified the experience of the Psalmist in after days : "I labour for peace, but when I speak to them thereof they make them ready to battle." "Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed, and he divided the people that were with him into two bands, and said, If Esau come to the one company and smite it, then the other company which is left shall escape." Thus leaving no human means unattempted to avert the impending calamity, uniting the wisdom of the serpent to the confiding simplicity of the dove, and by this wise and prudent arrangement, ensuring (however hostile might be the intentions of his brother) the safety of at least a portion of his family and his property.

It may perhaps be said, all the means adopted by this man

of God might have been adopted by any other man under similar circumstances. They were proofs indeed of forethought, prudence, and a sufficient degree of worldly wisdom, but there is nothing which evidences the superiority of the godly man over the worldly man in all this. My brethren, we acknowledge it; and we will acknowledge it in more than one instance before us; we will confess that the observation would equally hold good in other cases as in the subject of our present history. We readily admit that there are many circumstances in life, in which, to the outward observer, the real Christian and the merely moral and upright man of the world, appear to act from similar motives and with equal wisdom; there are even some in which the worldly man will appear to the greater advantage, and seem to take the higher ground, and to act perhaps with more decision and magnanimity than the Christian; and had you beheld Jacob marshalling his families, his flocks, and his herds, on the present occasion, this might have been your opinion of the incident before us. The bold man would have said, Why did Jacob thus cowardly make arrangements only for defeat? Why did he not endeavour to defend what was so justly dear to him? The timid man might have said, Why, when in such imminent peril, did he not at once turn and fly, and thus, since opposition was so evidently useless, secure all that God had given him! My brethren, the Christian's answer to both these inquiries is equally obvious—Jacob was in the path of duty, following the directions and marching under the commands of his heavenly leader, therefore he could not fly. But Jacob had already learnt, by bitter experience, the danger of hastening blessings by unjustifiable exertions; he had seen that the weapons of human warfare, violence, deceit, and subtlety, did but injure the cause they attempted to promote; he had deeply and justly suffered formerly for obtaining the blessing by an arm of flesh, he was resolved not to promote the fulfilment of it by the same unhallowed means, therefore he could not fight. The bystander could enter into

neither of these motives, and might therefore fairly make the objections we have imagined.

It is thus that the Christian so often appears contemptible in the eyes of the men of this world. They cannot appreciate his conduct, because they know not the laws by which he is governed. For instance, you are in difficulties, and a single step would place you beyond the reach of them—a trivial act of injustice, or a little equivocation, known only to your own conscience and to God, or the evincing what is termed a proper spirit, would at once emancipate you : to the mere man of the world it is perfectly inexplicable that you do not take this step ; he sees no impediment, and therefore cannot conceive that any thing but obtuseness of intellect, or weakness of judgment, could make you hesitate. These are cases very trying to the feelings of the natural heart ; you perceive as clearly as those around you, the advantages which a little deviation from the strait and narrow way would purchase you. But then you “hear a voice they cannot hear, you see a hand they cannot see,” you feel that to your own master you stand or fall, that that master has already drawn the line upon which you are to walk, and that in comparison with his approval, the applause or censure of the whole world is but as dust upon the balance. The question you ask therefore is simply, what does the Lord require of me ? and having ascertained (as far as the grace of God enables you) what is the will of your heavenly Father, you must pursue it through evil report and good report, undeterred by the clamours of designing enemies, and uninfluenced by the opinion of mistaken friends. You will neglect no means which are perfectly compatible with the will of your God : you will adopt none upon which you cannot most conscientiously invoke his presence and his blessing ; and having employed the means, you will leave the event to heaven, casting all your cares upon God, knowing that “he careth for you.”

But we must endeavour more minutely to apply the instructive incident before us. Do we, at the present moment, address

any who are placed in circumstances of peculiar difficulty or trial? Do these difficulties assail you upon the course which you have every reason to believe God has appointed for you to walk in? and are you sometimes tempted to think, if this were really the path of duty, should I so continually meet these hinderances and these difficulties? Let the example before you suggest consolation and encouragement. God himself had commanded Jacob to enter upon the journey, to travel the very road upon which we find him: it could not therefore be a question whether he were in the path of duty, and yet he had proceeded little more than a week upon the appointed way, when he encountered the appalling difficulty of which we speak. Be not, therefore, led to doubt whether the path upon which you are walking be of God's appointment, because only it is difficult. The spiritual path of the Christian is never one of unmixed gratification. He, who himself put on a crown of thorns, never intended that his followers should wear a crown of flowers. He, who has told you to take up your cross daily and follow him, well knew that you would not be able truly to follow him without having daily crosses to take up. He, who promised, that if you suffered you should also reign with him, loves his people too dearly to withhold that which is so essential to the fitting them for himself. "Beloved," says St. Peter, "think it not strange concerning the fiery trial, which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you, but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings, that when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy." The Christian's course is, indeed, "from a cross to a crown," and, though we would not have you seek crosses, God forbid that you should shrink from them, when fairly encountered in the cause of Christ, and in the way of his commandments. But do you still further ask, If my situation, difficult as it truly is, be that which Providence has appointed me, and if, therefore, I may not timidly fly from it, how may I hope to be enabled to persevere? we again say, observe the example before you, Jacob did not fly: neither did

he fight: his refuge was in prayer. Carefully lay this to heart—"the weapons of our warfare are not carnal." Happy would it have been for the church of Christ, if his followers had, in all ages, remembered this; happy for you, my brethren, if you are never tempted to forget it; you will not conquer by resistance, but like Jacob, by prayer. Prayer will furnish you with weapons, from the armoury of heaven—weapons, not of offence, but of defence. A throne of grace is, to the Christian, the citadel where he will always find a protector to aid, and the home where there is always a Father to listen to him. "I must tell this to my God," was the affecting observation of a Christian slave, while writhing under the lash of a cruel taskmaster! There was no one else who would hear him, no other being who could sympathize with him or relieve him. How many are the crosses of the Christian which ought only to be divulged to this never-failing friend; how many sorrows which can be poured into no bosom but that of his Redeemer? It is thus, that when you are weak, then are you strong; when, with the prophet, your "eyes fail with looking upwards," and you cry, "O Lord, I am oppressed, undertake for me," then you are sure of victory.

Very interesting is it to the Christian to observe this method of relief so plainly marked out by the conduct of the patriarch, whose life we are reviewing. Follow Jacob from the scene of all those prudent arrangements to which we have adverted, go with him from the field into the tent, and behold how he is employed; you will find him on his knees before the footstool of his heavenly Father, acknowledging, that every other aid is vain; and that, after all his efforts, his strength is in the Lord his God. Mark the language in which he thus pours out his overburdened soul before the mercy-seat: "O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the Lord which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee; I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which thou hast shown unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this

Jordan, and now am become two bands. Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau ;” for “thou saidst, I will surely do thee good.”

Observe the humility, the gratitude, the confidence which these petitions breathe. How worthy the imitation of the Christian, how admirable a model for ourselves ! They are grounded simply upon the covenant into which the Almighty had entered with these holy men of old, “the everlasting covenant ordered in all things and sure ;” and is not this also the Christian’s strength in prayer ? When you pray, said our divine Master, say, “Our Father which art in heaven.” It is “the spirit of *adoption*,” which can alone enable you to address the Almighty thus ; possessing this spirit, you pray to a God with whom you are already in covenant ; your petitions are grounded upon a solemn promise ; you speak to One who has pledged himself to hear the petitions of them that ask in his Son’s name, and, therefore, while you know and acknowledge that you are unworthy of the least of all the mercies which God has showed unto his servant, you are enabled to come boldly unto the throne of grace, that you may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. “O that there were such a heart” in every one of us ! then indeed we might hope that the “words of our lips, and the meditations of our hearts, would be always acceptable in the sight of God, our strength and our Redeemer.”

Again observe the gratitude visible in this address. He reminds God of what He had done for him, feeling assured by this of what he will do ; “with my staff,” and nothing but my staff, “I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands ;” how blessed, how multiplied ! If this argument were powerful in the mouth of Jacob, who only reverted to temporal blessings, surely it is irresistible when flowing from the heart of the true believer. Behold, O heavenly Father, what thou hast already done for me ! It is thine own work, thine own undeserved mercy ; by the grace of God I am what I am. Thou wilt not forsake me now. When thou first be-

held me, I was an alien from thee, poorer than the poorest of thy servants, banished from thy presence, and yet me "hast thou quickened, who was dead in trespasses and sins." Surely these former mercies are pledges of future ; for if, as the apostle says, "while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life."

Again, observe the confidence in the promises of his heavenly Father, manifested in this prayer of Jacob : "Thou saidst, I will surely do thee good." It was on this account that Jacob felt convinced that God would do him good ; it was enough for him that God had *said* it ; for "God is not man that he should lie, or the son of man that he should repent." This humble but unshaken confidence is the very soul of prayer. Come thus to the throne of grace, pleading the exceeding great and precious promises of your God, and you will never be sent empty away. Put me in remembrance, (says God,) "let us plead together, declare thou that thou mayest be justified." Whatever may be the blessing that you desire, put the Almighty in remembrance of the promise by which He has ensured it to you. It is his own direction, and therefore cannot be unavailing. Do you require forgiveness ? take with you this promise, "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow." Do you need protection ? remind the Lord that He has said, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." Do you ask acceptance ? He has declared, "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." Happy is it for the Christian, when he can faithfully plead and contentedly repose his soul upon such promises as these, he will have no cause for alarm ; the "enemy may come in like a flood, but the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him."

There are times, we trust, when many among you pray thus, and for a little season, the glow of devotion and the fire of faith continue ; but alas ! in most of us, how speedily quenched ! how soon exchanged for the trifling thoughts or vain imaginations suggested by the world around us ! No

doubt Jacob participated in this weakness of our fallen nature, for he was a "man subjected to like passions as we are;" it was therefore necessary that he should be taught the important lesson which our blessed Lord and his disciples have so continually laboured to impress upon us, viz., that "men ought always to pray and not to faint;" and observe how remarkably he was taught it!

Then continues the inspired historian, "Jacob was left alone, and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day." This man, as we learn from the 30th verse, was no less a person than God, called by the prophet Hosea, "the angel," "the Lord of Hosts," or Jehovah, "the messenger of the covenant," the Lord Jesus Christ, who under similar appearances had communed with Adam and Noah, Abraham and Lot. "And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh, and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint as he wrestled with him. And he said, let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." "And he blessed him there."

In this most mysterious transaction, however inexplicable may be the *fact*, the *lesson* to be imparted is sufficiently obvious. It was to teach Jacob, as the holy men of old were often taught, by act and not by word, that no blessing would God deny to persevering prayer. It is thus that the prophet Hosea explains it when he says, "By his strength, Jacob had power with God; yea, he had power over the angel and prevailed; he wept and made supplication;" an instance of that holy perseverance by which our Lord assures us, "the kingdom of heaven until now suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." But lest Jacob should attribute his success to his own strength, "the uncreated angel" who wrestled with him, by a single touch lamed him for life, to convince him that God did not want the power, but the will to conquer him; that God is not *constrained* by the prayers of his people, but that he, in love and mercy, *permits* faithful, persevering prayer to be omnipotent.

Then did the Almighty reveal to Jacob, by the change of his name, the astonishing nature of the conflict in which he had been engaged. He said "Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel, for as a prince hast thou power with GOD and with men, and hast prevailed."

My Christian brethren, the time will not allow me to dwell at any length upon the application of this most remarkable incident; but, oh! let it not be disregarded. If Jacob's petitions have suggested *matter* for prayer, let his wrestling suggest the *manner*—that prayer must be continued, persevering, and ardent, as well as faithful, humble, and confiding. Meditate upon it in the way of serious self-examination. Inquire whether you know any thing experimentally of this *wrestling* with God. We admit that it is a highly figurative expression, but if there be meaning in language, it cannot represent the poor, cold, formal service which we too often misname prayer. In the wrestler, every limb, every muscle, every faculty is engaged and his grasp once taken, he never relaxes his hold, until he has gained the object for which he is struggling. Is there any thing in your holiest efforts at the throne of grace at all resembling this? Yet this is prayer! That earnest application to the Father of our spirits which engages every feeling and affection of the heart, every thought and faculty of the mind, which, if we may so express ourselves, teaches us to cling around the mercy-seat, and never to relax our hold and rise from our knees without the blessing. Pray thus perseveringly, and you will pray effectually; "when thou shalt call," as the prophet has declared, "the Lord shall answer thee; when thou shalt cry, he shall say, Here I am." Thus like Jacob shall you have power with God and shall prevail. Whatever discouragements you may meet with in coming to a throne of grace, be not deterred, remember that on the very spot where God had lamed Jacob, there, even there, he blessed him. Be assured that your greater discouragements are only preludes to greater blessings, that your ever gracious Intercessor is at the present moment as tender, as willing to hear the cry of his children, as

in the days of his flesh ; that now, as then, he cannot close his ears or his heart to persevering prayer ; continue, therefore, to entreat him, pray without ceasing, and you will, in his own good time, assuredly receive the wished-for answer, “ Great is thy faith, be it unto thee even as thou wilt.”

LECTURE V.

GENESIS XXXIII. 4.

“ And Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept.”

OUR last discourse brought us to that period in the history of Jacob, in which, after having seen him making every preparation that prudence could dictate against the hostile approach of his brother, we beheld him committing himself in humble, fervent prayer to the God of his salvation, spreading before the Lord the anxieties and apprehensions which filled his bosom, and engaged throughout the live long night, in “ weeping and making supplication” until he “ had power with God and prevailed.” We are to commence our present observations by endeavouring to trace the effect of this prayer, and to behold the manner in which, in answer to Jacob’s petitions, the Almighty averted the threatened calamity. Before we enter upon this investigation, we cannot refrain from endeavouring to strengthen those observations upon prayer which formed a prominent feature of our last discourse, by remarking how powerful an inducement is offered to the prayers of the Christian by the consideration, that the Word of God furnishes us with so many instances of *answers* to the petitions of his people.*

* For a connected view of the answers to prayer, contained in the Scriptures, see a very interesting little work denominated, “ The Achievements of Prayer.”

God would have acted with equal justice, and man would have been equally without excuse, had the Bible not recorded a single answer to prayer ; had the Almighty contented himself with commanding us to pray, and promising to hear us without revealing to us any particular instance in which the command had been obeyed and the promise fulfilled. What additional obligations then do the injunctions to prayer possess, since our heavenly Father has in mercy permitted them to be accompanied by so many astonishing instances of accomplishment. Peculiar, indeed, must be the situation of that Christian who cannot look into the pages of God's word, and find some instances in which his own particular necessity, be it what it may, has been experienced by the saints of old, and been made the subjects of their petitions, and been removed or alleviated in answer to their prayers. My brethren, if you would really allow these instances their due weight in your minds, prayer would acquire an importance and a value of which you have, perhaps, at present but little conception. There is nothing in the Bible to lead you to imagine that God attended more earnestly to the prayers of the patriarchs, or answered them more readily, than he now answers your own ;—every thing to assure you that “ whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer *believing*, ye shall receive.” Whence comes it, then, that, to so many amongst us, prayer appears comparatively to have lost its value ? Whence is it that, compared with these men of old, this heart-felt intercourse with our Creator, and Redeemer, occupies so small a portion of our lives ? Is it that we have less sorrow, less necessity, less sin than they had ? Is it not rather that we have less faith ? We do not believe that God really hears the prayers and answers the petitions of all who faithfully seek him, and therefore we have no heart for prayer. My brethren, I would appeal to your own consciences whether there be not too much of truth in this. You perhaps consider prayer as a duty, and would not, from feelings of obedience towards God, upon any consideration, absolutely neglect it : so far this is well, but it is very different from that true appreciation, that real enjoy-

ment of close and intimate communion with God, which could induce a saint of old to exclaim, "As the hart panteth for the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God! My soul thirsteth for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?" These are the feelings which can alone render prayer an enjoyment and a delight. Are these then the feelings with which you approach a throne of grace? or does so much of formality and faithlessness mingle with your performance of this great duty, that many a petition is offered, and many a prayer poured forth, without any very deep consideration of the Being you address, or any very heartfelt conviction for which you seek? In too many instances, judging from our own hearts, we fear it is so; and the consequence of this is, that prayer is comparatively neglected: it has indeed still its stated hours, or rather its stated moments, in the daily occupation of the Christian, but like some obsolete custom which is not literally banished, but continues to be borne with, rather out of compliment to time and usages that have passed away, and from a kindly feeling towards the habits of our forefathers, than from any peculiar interest which we take in the observance itself; so with too many, the morning and the evening still see them on their knees, still hear the words of prayer passing thoughtlessly from their lips, but the actual intention of the service is overlooked and forgotten. It is no longer the season to which the full heart is looking with anxious delight throughout the busy hours of necessary occupation, as the time when it will be able to unburden itself into the bosom of a friend; no longer the season in which, if hungering and thirsting after righteousness, we should rejoice, as ministering to us of "the hidden manna," and the refreshing streams of "the water of life;" but the hour which we almost regret must intervene between our employments and our repose, and which we gladly avail ourselves of every plausible excuse to abbreviate or to omit. The natural consequence of this is, that when we are driven by affliction, or trial, or difficulty, to seek in earnest the throne of grace, we go to God as strangers; there is a feeling of shyness and awkwardness

pervading all our intercourse with heaven, much resembling that which necessarily marks our correspondence with an absent friend, when it has been long intermitted, or our first meeting with a casual acquaintance after long absence. How widely different from these holy men of old ! They invariably lived at all times *near* to God, and the natural result was that no sooner did affliction assail or difficulty oppress them, than they turned for refuge to the mercy-seat, poured forth their complaints with humble confidence into the ear of a father, firmly believing that what they “asked faithfully they should obtain effectually ;” and they were never disappointed, they received “help from the sanctuary and were strengthened out of Zion.” The truth of these assertions, as they refer to yourselves, I leave to the convictions of your own consciences ; as they refer to the holy men of old, the history before us will abundantly verify.

Jacob having passed the night in fervent prayer, and having, by this holy violence, overcome (as we explained in our last) that supernatural visitant who wrestled with him, and obtained on that same spot the blessing, proceeds the following morning on his journey. He knew that the dreaded interview must still take place ; that Esau and his four hundred armed men must be encountered : but he no longer trembles for the issue. Before he had thus “cast all his care upon God,” we were told that even at the mere mention of Esau’s threatened visit “he was greatly afraid and distressed ;” now, as the inspired historian relates, “Jacob lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, Esau came and with him four hundred men,” but not a word of Jacob’s fear. The Lord had promised that he should “have power with God and man, and should prevail ;” and Jacob implicitly believed the promise ; he knew not in what *manner* God would deliver him, and therefore he still adopted all the precautionary measures to which we before adverted ; but he knew that God *would* deliver him, and therefore he no longer dreaded the result. How remarkable is the issue of this long-anticipated trouble ? The two bands approach each other. Jacob draws near his brother, still perfectly uncertain

of the event, knowing, that at a word from Esau, his predatory followers would put the whole company to the sword, when we are told, "Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him, and they wept." Thus prayer was honoured, the faithfulness of God exemplified, and the life and property of his devout servant rescued from destruction.

How delightful a termination to all Jacob's anxieties and fears ; and how much to instruct, to encourage, and to establish the Christian ! Who among us cannot sympathize in Jacob's apprehensions and Jacob's deliverance ? Have you never, my brethren, beheld at a distance some calamity or trial, the approach of which was so appalling that you dare not attempt to realize it, and at the same time so certain that you knew it to be inevitable ; and has not your faithless heart almost persuaded you that it was in vain even to pray against it, that it was "hoping against hope," to expect deliverance. Surely such instances have occurred to every one of us ; and if we have by the grace of God been enabled to persevere, how often has the event been mercifully overruled, and the cloud, apparently black with supernatural tempest, has burst in blessings on our heads ! While, alas ! how often has it also happened, that we have given up in hopeless despondency, because we have concluded that the event was certain, thus limiting the Almighty, and believing, that if he deliver us not in the way which we anticipate, he cannot deliver us at all. Let the example before you "lift up the hands which hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees." Let it convince you that God is never without a refuge for his people. He may not avert the impending calamity, but he will, in some manner, so ameliorate the circumstances of it, or so influence your own mind to receive it, that when it happens, you will scarcely believe that this was the event to which you had long looked forward with such unqualified apprehension, or such unmitigated repugnancy.

If this be true (and the experience of many who hear me will, I am sure, verify the declaration) as respects temporal

trials or calamities, how much more remarkably is it manifested with regard to spiritual difficulties! Do I, at the present moment, address any who are entering, or desirous of entering, upon the heavenward path; and do they feel such apprehensions of the trials that may await them, that they are almost ready to exclaim with the Psalmist;—"Fearfulness and trembling are come upon me. O, that I had wings like a dove, for then would I flee away and be at rest?" I would remind them, that what the Almighty here performed for Jacob is but the faintest shadow of what he has promised to do for them. We may say to the young Christian, as our Lord said to the Jews, "Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures;" you are scarcely aware of the superabundance of the promises by which God has pledged himself to help you and to carry you through. Take but one small specimen of them, that the richness of the ore may send you to the mine from which it is dug. "Thus saith the Lord: Fear thou not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God. I will *strengthen* thee: yea I will *help* thee; yea I will *uphold* thee with the right hand of my righteousness."

But do you think that your difficulties are peculiar to yourself, that the obstructions in your path are so vast that you cannot surmount them? Hear again the word of the Lord: "Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel; I will help thee, saith the Lord, and thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. Behold....thou shalt thresh the *mountains* (those very obstructions which you think impassable, thou shalt not only surmount them but *thresh* them,) and beat them *small*, and shalt make the hills as chaff. Thou shalt fan them, and the wind shall carry them away, and the whirlwind shall scatter them." *Who* can despond when such offers as these are made to each and all? May the Holy Spirit of our God carry them home to those bleeding hearts which need their healing unction, and their quickening power!

The brothers having, by that astonishing, though invisible influence, which the Almighty possesses over the affections

and wills of man, been thus reconciled to each other, once more separated upon their journey ; Jacob most wisely declining Esau's kindly intended invitation, that they should unite their companies and travel together. We say, most *wisely* declining it, for so essentially different were they in their habits, manners, thoughts, and occupations, that little happiness would have accrued from their intimate association. Esau was, as we have seen, a man of the world, Jacob a man of God ; still they were brothers, and as the children of the same parents, it was unquestionably their duty to know and to love, and to be kindly affectioned one towards another ; but they were not called upon to live in the closest bonds of intimacy, to travel the same road, and to intermingle in the same company. Jacob was therefore wise in resolutely declining the offer of Esau, and continuing his journey surrounded by the peaceful and domestic blessings with which he had commenced it ; refusing even the retinue with which Esau would have honoured him, but which would have ill assorted with the plain and simple habits of the Patriarch. There was a degree of prudence and circumspection in all this, well worthy the consideration of the Christian. You also, my brethren, are commanded by your holy calling to "seek peace and ensue it," "as much as lieth in you to live peaceably with all men ;" but you are *not* commanded to unite companies, and to contract intimacies, and to league yourself closely with any, but with "them who are of the household of faith." "Can two walk together except they be agreed?" saith the Lord, and daily experience supplies the answer ; for is it not most wofully demonstrated by the broken friendships, and the unhappy intimacies, and the miserable marriages, which form such prominent but disgraceful features in every Christian community ? Jacob and Esau might embrace for a few moments, or act affectionately for a passing hour, but if they had attempted to *sojourn* together, the enmity so early implanted between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, would have infallibly broken forth, and Esau would in all probability once more have hated Jacob, or the

spiritually-minded man of God have been drawn from his allegiance by his more worldly-minded brother. The scripture is full of examples where the want of such prudence as Jacob manifested, has produced these fatal effects ; would that we were enabled to add, that such examples are *only* to be found in scripture ; alas ! we dare not say, for we cannot think so.

Do we at the present moment speak to none who for want of this Christian circumspection have joined company with those who can but little sympathize in their hopes and joys, their troubles and their fears ? Do we address none who have united themselves in friendship, and intimacies, and marriages with those from whom, upon all essential points, they widely differ ; whose hearts have never been enlightened by the Spirit of God to choose that good part which shall not be taken away from them ? There is nothing so dangerous, so entangling to the Christian, and especially to the youthful Christian, as such associations as these, for you cannot but approximate to those in sentiment with whom you closely unite yourself in friendship, and unfortunately in these unnatural alliances there is no reciprocation. The world does not, as you vainly imagine, meet the Christian half way. Its partisans have no sacrifices to make : in uniting themselves to you they have nothing valuable to give up, while you, in uniting yourself to them, yield by degress every thing most valuable and most dear. Be assured that you cannot take a single step towards their sinful habits, and compliances, and amusements, without taking it in an opposite direction from your Father's house ; that the distance is daily widening, and that the closer you draw to those who know not God, the further you separate yourself, the more you alienate yourself from heaven. You begin by giving up only what you consider the non-essentials of religion from an amiable desire of conciliating the good-will, or perhaps of being useful to those with whom you associate ; but as you advance, you discover that every cession on your part only leads to higher demands, and more exorbitant requests on theirs ; from partaking with them, at first, of what is merely

indifferent, or perhaps in itself innocent, you are led on to those things which are inexpedient, and will probably end in what is absolutely guilty. 'This is, alas! no imaginary danger; for may we not say to some among you—look back through the vista of a few months or years, from the spot on which you at present stand, and mark how rapid has been the change in your feelings and conduct! You are scarcely able to recognize your former selves. Where are now those feelings so tremblingly alive to the honour and glory of God, those anxieties to “redeem the time because the days are evil,” once so prevalent in your bosom? Where are those desires to benefit the souls of all with whom you converse? that almost instinctive dread even of the smallest deviation from the ways of godliness, which made the least sin such an abhorrence to your soul, that its committal would fill your eyes with tears, and bring watchfulness and wakefulness to your couch? How few of these feelings have survived! scarcely a vestige of them remaining; and yet you have not at present, perhaps, been led into gross sins, you have not sunk into the depth of enormities. Whence, then, has come this imperceptibly advancing change? It is the natural effect of your intimacy with those who make a mock at sin, who think all religion of the heart superstition and enthusiasm. It is the predicted result of “the friendship of the world,” which the Bible has declared is “enmity with God.” It is the fatal consequence which the infallible word of the Lord has proclaimed: “She that liveth in pleasure is *dead* while she liveth.” These are the reasons for your present state of indifference to subjects once so dear to you. Would to God it were as easy to apply the remedy as to recount the reasons! Yet should we ill perform our duty as Christian ministers, as those who have the charge over you in the Lord—if we did not suggest the remedy—if we did not say to all such, there is but one method of escape: “Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.” You must, however painful be the effort, arouse yourself, and turn, and retrace your

steps, and flee as for your life. There is no other remedy ; you cannot journey with the gay and splendid retinue of Esau, and yet expect to be partakers of the rest of Jacob : therefore, hear ye *the words of the Lord* ; and may He who possesses the residue of the Spirit apply them with efficacy to your souls, “ Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly.” “ I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner ; with such an one, no not to eat.” “ Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers ; for, what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness ? and what communion hath light with darkness ? Wherefore, come out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you !” Here is your remedy ; the only remedy which the word of God can offer you ; until you plainly evince, by your conduct, “ as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord,” and resolve with David, that you “ will not *know*” (in the habits of intimacy) “ a wicked person,” you cannot be preparing for the society of those “ who are redeemed from among men, being the first-fruits unto God, and to the Lamb,” and who “ follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth.”

Happy would it have been for Jacob, had he, upon all occasions, manifested the same degree of prudence and circumspection, as in the incident to which we have been referring ; but, as years pass on, there is much to distress and harass him in his children’s conduct, and not a little to humble him in his own.

We find him, at the opening of the 35th chapter, still lingering in the country of the Shechemites, although the crying sins of his family, too little restrained, as it appears, by the parental authority of Jacob, had made him an object of hatred to the people among whom he dwelt. His worldly affairs had now been blessed with a long season of prosperity : and what was

the consequence? Had success brought him nearer to God? Had he, whom we beheld in the day of affliction coming so fervently, and so constantly to the throne of grace, been as constant and as fervent in his applications there during the sunshine of prosperity? We fear we cannot answer in the affirmative. Worldly ease and temporal enjoyment had produced that effect upon Jacob which they frequently, we had almost said invariably, produce upon ourselves; they had rendered him less mindful of the Lord God of his salvation. You will recollect, that when Jacob left his father's house, a destitute and solitary wanderer, the Almighty manifested to him upon the first night of his journey, assurances of protection, in the remarkable vision of the ladder; and you will doubtless remember that on that solemn occasion, Jacob had vowed that if God would be with him, and only give him bread to eat and raiment to put on, and bring him back in peace, he would there erect an altar, and dedicate the tenth part of all that he possessed to God. Let us now inquire in what manner this vow had been performed. Twenty years had now elapsed, and the Almighty had most bountifully fulfilled *His* portion of the covenant. He had indeed been with Jacob, never for a moment deserting him; He had brought him back in peace; He had given him not merely bread and raiment, but made him rich and increased in goods; and he who with his staff only had passed over Jordan, had now become a prince and a potentate; where, then, was Jacob's portion of the covenant? where was his vow? To the disgrace of our fallen nature, unfulfilled and forgotten! But God is not to be thus trifled with, with impunity. "God is not mocked." He therefore speaks to Jacob, not as heretofore, in words of kindness, but in deeds of chastening. He endeavours to remind him by the severe memento of *family affliction*. The ruin of his only daughter, and the iniquitous and disgraceful conduct of two of his sons, are the methods by which the Almighty first knocks at the heart of Jacob. The sleep of prosperity is, however, too secure for this to be effectual. How, then, does the Almighty proceed! Does he punish more severely?

does he plant some sharper thorn in the bosom of his forgetful servant? Man would assuredly have acted thus: but how delightful is it to trace, in all the ways, and all the works of God, the infinite superiority of the Creator to the creature.

My brethren, God has declared that punishment is his “strange work;” a work in which he never engages, until our sins become clamorous for vengeance. In the instance before us, therefore, instead of proceeding to greater extremities, God in justice remembers mercy; having, in *justice punished*, He now delights himself, by returning in *mercy*, to *spare*, and condescends in person to remind Jacob of his neglected vow: “And God said unto Jacob, Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there, and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother.” How mild, and how affecting an expostulation! the Almighty reminds Jacob, not so much of the neglect of the servant, as of the mercy of the master. He does not say, build an altar unto the God whom thou hast promised, and hast disappointed, but unto the “God who appeared unto thee, when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother.” There must have been something peculiarly touching in the recollection which was awakened by these words: When thou fleddest from an *enemy*, and that enemy a *brother*, *I* appeared for thee; *I* was thy refuge. Blessed be God, there is then “*a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.*” Where is the heart that could have withstood such an expostulation? Certainly not in the bosom of any real child of God; Jacob was instantly recalled by it to his allegiance and his duty, and proceeded to make preparations for the accomplishment of his vow.

Our review of these must, however, be deferred until the next discourse; but we cannot omit the application which this instance of the Almighty’s method of dealing with his servants so strikingly suggests.

There may be some among you standing at the present hour in the sight of God, in a precisely similar situation to that of Jacob; you also have voluntarily been made the subjects of a

most solemn and important vow which you have, at least in most instances, thoughtfully and premeditatedly acknowledged before God. The terms of that vow are neither ambiguous nor obscure. You have pledged yourself to “renounce the world, the flesh, and the devil,” and to “continue Christ’s faithful soldier and servant unto your life’s end.” My brethren, I would most affectionately urge you to the inquiry, How am I fulfilling this vow? Is it continually present to my mind, that I am bound by an obligation of such infinite importance? When tempted by my own heart, or by my spiritual enemies, is this the tendency of my reply, “How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” I who have dedicated myself to his holy service by so solemn a covenant. Or, like Jacob, have years of prosperity and happiness rendered you utterly forgetful of your promises? If it be so, we tremble for the consequences. You have seen that God is not mocked: what we have *vowed*, God will see that we *pay*, or will in anger and in judgment visit the neglect of it. He has himself said, “Pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldst not vow, than that thou shouldst vow and not pay.” If you are a child of God, He will not suffer this forgetfulness to continue; He will remind you, perhaps, as He reminded Jacob, by some severe domestic calamity—by cutting off some creature idol, or some creature comfort, that though many years may have passed away, and the very tenor of your vow may be almost forgotten by yourself, it is as fresh in the memory of God as if you were now pledging yourself before his mercy-seat: for with Him “a thousand years are but as yesterday.” Oh! do not *compel* the Almighty to have recourse to his “strange work;” in a single moment He can strike a blow, the effects of which would carry you, with a wounded spirit and a broken heart, through a course of lingering wretchedness to a premature grave. And after this, there is more that He can do; “God is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” Be warned, then, we earnestly beseech you; remember your vow, your baptismal vow; “Remember from whence thou art

fallen, and repent, and do the first works ;” the sceptre of mercy is still extended ; wait not until it be exchanged for the rod of judgment. “ Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and so ye perish from the right way, if his wrath be kindled, yea but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him.”

LECTURE VI.

GENESIS XXXV. 2.

“ Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments.”

OUR last Lecture concluded with the very striking remonstrance from the Almighty to Jacob, which precedes the words of the text, and was intended to remind him of his forgotten vow, and to urge upon him the accomplishment of his neglected promise. Jacob, as we have seen, had long lived in sad forgetfulness of those peculiar mercies of God, which he had pledged himself to commemorate. He had too long resided in the immediate vicinity of persons who knew not God, and deeply had he suffered in his family by this approximation. For he had lived to behold his children guilty of sins, at the bare recital of which, humanity shudders ; but Jacob was a man of God ; and though on some occasions, certainly deficient in the proper exercise of parental authority, so acutely did he feel the guilt of his children, so sensible was he of their alienation from God, that we find him, in the text, making every endeavour which a godly parent could make to reform them, and even in the closing scene of his life, thus strongly reprobating their unholy conduct : — “ O my soul ! come not thou into their secret ; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united ;” “ cursed be their anger, for it was fierce, and their wrath, for it was cruel.”

There are few things which plant so sharp a thorn in the

heart of a parent, and more especially of a Christian parent, as the knowledge that his children are not walking in the way of God's commandments, that their hearts are not right with God. But there is a circumstance which can even sharpen that thorn, and add poignancy to the wounds which it inflicts, viz., the conviction in the mind of the parent, that every effort has not been made, every prayer been offered, every example set before his children, which might, instrumentally, have won them to the love of God, and to the paths of holiness. This it is which causes the thorn to rankle; and from this we fear that Jacob's bosom was not entirely free. Had he not permitted his daughter to mingle unnecessarily with the daughters of the unbelievers, (in the words of the historian,) "to go out to see the daughters of the land," he had not lamented her ruin. Had he not, at that critical period, "held his peace," and committed the management of his family too much to the ungovernable passions of his sons, he had not been made thus wretched by their enormities.

How few are the sufferings of ourselves, or of our families, which we may not trace to our own infirmities or sins! What an additional motive for a charitable view of the conduct of those around us, and for carefully scrutinizing our own! Christian parents, examine seriously and conscientiously, how much of the present worldliness and frivolity, and even sinfulness of your children, is attributable to yourselves. How much of guilt to them, and of anguish to you, might have been escaped, had you early, consistently, and prayerfully educated them according to the privileges and the duties of their baptismal covenant, in a sincere renunciation of "the world, the flesh, and the devil?" The promises of God that this would not have been ineffectual, are most ample and most encouraging; for has he not expressly declared to his people, "I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring; and they shall spring up as willows by the water-courses. One shall say, I am the Lord's, and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand

unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel." How beautiful a picture of a whole family converted to the true and saving knowledge of the Redeemer, each in turn admitted as the lambs into the fold of the good Shepherd, and rising up to call him blessed. How cheering a prospect for parents who are adopting in faith the means which God has put into their power ! Do not, however, let us be misunderstood ; as if the conversion of the children's souls were in the hands of the parents, and must infallibly be attached to the use of any, or of all the means which they can adopt ; it is essentially the work of God's free Spirit, who will do it as He pleases, and when He pleases. 'These are among the secret " things which belong to the Lord our God," known only to Himself, and disposed of only by His sovereign will: it is enough, that if you desire the blessing, you must be found as earnest in the pursuit of it, and in the use of the means, as if they could command it ; but then you must trust implicitly to God's grace, to bestow it as a free, unmerited gift. Remember for your comfort, it is only for our failure in what is possible, that we shall be punished, not for our failure in that which, to all but God himself, is impossible ; the heaviest judgment with which in holy writ a godly parent was ever visited, was not because he had not made his sons the pious and devoted followers of that almighty Being whom he himself delighted to obey, but simply because " his sons made themselves vile, and he *restrained* them not." 'This, most assuredly, Eli might have done ; this, in all probability, Jacob might have done ; and we fear that you will find it difficult to deny, before that God who seeth the heart, that this you also might have done. Oh ! that every Christian parent would lay this seriously to heart ; and if I now address any of you who are conscious that, with Jacob, you have erred in this essential point of your duty, may the example of Jacob which we are about to review, be blessed by the Holy Spirit of God to your edification and improvement ; and while a merciful God forgives for his dear Son's sake your past derelictions, may you be the more earnest in endeavouring

to exercise your parental authority in the service of the King of kings.

No sooner had God recalled to Jacob's mind his promises and his vow, than we find the patriarch anxious for the sanctification of all connected with him, before he presumed to go up with them to Bethel, the house of God. We are told, "Then Jacob said to his household, and all that were with him, Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean and change your garments." This was acting faithfully and conscientiously towards all the members of his numerous family; but who would have believed that such a command could have been needed? That in Jacob's household there should have been strange gods to be put away? That he, whose life had been a life of mercies, and of such intimate communion with the true God, should have been induced to countenance idolatry and ungodliness in his tents: that his dependents, his children, and as we are told in another place, even Rachel, the favourite wife of his bosom, should have thus fearfully transgressed, and, still more grievous, that this is the first time in which we have heard the voice of Jacob raised steadily and firmly against it. Probably the patriarch partook so largely of the infirmities of our fallen nature, that he dared not, even though the honour of God was at stake, risk the anger or discontent of those who were dear to him; perhaps, had such an interference been urged upon him by any thing short of a divine command, he would have replied, that it would be not only painful, but hopeless to interfere; that his word would not be heeded, that his household had gone too widely astray from God to be recalled by the voice of man. Christian brethren, is not this the fallacious manner in which you yourselves continually reason? You behold conduct in those closely related to you, or immediately connected with you, aye the very members of your own household, which, as servants of God, you cannot approve because you know that your Master cannot approve it. You mark the rising of pride, or of vanity, or of display; you see, perhaps, the younger members of your

families worshipping those strange deities of pleasure, of folly, and of worldliness; the elder branches bowing the knee to the golden idols of wealth and human applause, and you have refrained from expostulating with them upon their danger and their guilt; you have never yet said honestly or fearlessly to them, You are upon the broad road and the beaten way which lead to destruction; all your labours are for time. Eternity, vast, boundless eternity, does not enter into your calculations, and yet you stand upon its verge every day and every hour.

If these members of your household perish, if they be cut off in unrepented sin, or snatched away in the midst of a course of worldly folly, how will you answer it at the great day of account? If you beheld a fellow-creature perishing for lack of food, would you not endeavour to supply it? If you saw him sinking beneath the waters, would you not hold out a helping hand? How then can you justify your indifference, when it is not the body but the soul that is perilled; not time, but eternity, which is at stake? Perhaps you witness not these sins in your household—all is orderly—all is outwardly correct—it is even what is called a religious family; but then, alas! its members are content with a nominal religion, cold, heartless, and influential, in which the outward form is substituted for the spiritual grace; no real turning of the heart to God; no fervent love to the Saviour; no anxious desire of approving themselves to him in all the daily transactions of life. This false and formal religion is among “the strange gods” of the days in which we live; and can you calmly suffer those who are dear to you thus to worship an unknown God? can you, in silence, behold them mistaking the form for the reality, and “building themselves up,” not “on our most holy faith,” but in self-righteousness, and spiritual ignorance, and self-delusion; and do they hear no warning word from you? Have you never told them that these are gods which cannot save? Have you never urged them to look into the deep corruption of their own hearts and to know themselves? Have you never dwelt upon their absolute need of a better righteousness than their

own to justify them before God, "even the righteousness which is of God by the faith of Jesus Christ unto all and *upon* all them that believe;" and earnestly entreated them to go to the "fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness," to which you yourself have delighted to resort, where you have found healing for your guilt, and peace for your soul? Have you not, in short, as Jacob did, affectionately urged them: "Put away your strange gods," wash you, make you clean? Oh! if your hearts were really filled with the love of God and of our Saviour Jesus Christ, there would be no need of these inquiries: the difficulty would not be to speak of Him, but to refrain from speaking of Him to all around you; "like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard, that went down to the skirts of his garment;" so would be the unction with which you would delight to dwell upon heaven and heavenly things, the duties and the promises of the gospel in all your intercourse with men, from your dearest friend, to your lowest dependent.

Proceed we now to mark what was the effect in Jacob's case, of his faithful expostulation. Did his family resist the command? were his words spoken in vain? So far from it, that the very verse which follows assures us, that immediately upon his bidding, without a single exception, a single denial, "they gave unto Jacob all the strange gods which were in their hands, and all the earrings which were in their ears, and Jacob hid them under the oak which was by Shechem." Such is continually the manner in which a duty, difficult and hopeless in the prospect, is rendered easy and successful, the moment we have sufficient faith to attempt to carry it into execution. Such, we firmly believe, would be the result of an honest declaration upon these important points, in an infinitely greater number of instances, than even the most faithful Christian anticipates; and we cannot doubt that we shall hereafter behold many among the redeemed of the Lord, who might have been "*our* joy and crown of rejoicing," had we been more faithful to them, or more industrious in the work of God, placed as

jewels in the crown of some brother Christian, who dared to speak when we were silent, or to labour when we were slothful and indifferent. For be assured, brethren, that where expostulation is offered in a truly Christian spirit, and where the life and temper of the speaker are not widely at variance with it, men do listen, and listen willingly, much more frequently than we imagine; and, although no instantaneous effect be produced, some arrow may be fixed in the conscience which is never afterwards extracted; some seeds sown in the memory, which may lie dormant for years, but at last "take root downwards, and bear fruit upwards," when "the sower who went forth to sow" that seed, has long since finished his work, and been called to his reward. Surely, if you consider this, and reflect upon the unspeakable blessedness of being instrumental in converting but one sinner from the error of his ways, or bringing one soul nearer to its God, you will deeply regret the many opportunities you have already lost, and anxiously avail yourself of the smallest opening for future usefulness to which the finger of God shall point you. It is when our lips are closed by sickness, or our labours in the service of our divine Master unexpectedly suspended by the inscrutable will of our heavenly Father, that, for the first time, we rightly estimate the gracious privilege of having ever been permitted to "put our hand to the plough," in this great and glorious work; then, indeed, we only regret that while health and strength were bestowed upon us, we were not more willing "to spend and be spent" for God; that we did not give greater diligence in the work of our high calling; that we were not more "instant in season and out of season," affectionately urging these great truths upon the hearts of all with whom we had to do.

Very encouraging is it to observe the manner in which, after Jacob had purified his household and performed his promised vow, the Lord appeared unto him, and not only confirmed the change of his name, but repeated to him the blessed assurances of his temporal and spiritual greatness. Perhaps, with the exception of the closing scene of Jacob's life, this was the season of his

greatest happiness ; his family and his household brought in apparent sincerity to the worship of the true God, the greatest blessing, (next to the conversion of his own soul,) which the servant of God can enjoy. In addition to this, every comfort that worldly prosperity could offer was possessed by him. Every joy that the anticipation of the future could bestow was insured to him ; there was nothing left for him to desire. Alas ! how closely connected, in this vale of tears, are our sorrows and our joys. Bethel beheld Jacob at the summit of worldly happiness. Bethlehem, the next town through which he passes on his return, sees him in the very depths of affliction, a sorrowing widower ! Rachel, his beloved partner, is taken from him in a moment ! and (peculiarly distressing to his feelings) while giving birth to a second son. Her passionate exclamation had been, " Give me children, or else I die." Her prayer was heard, the children given, but her life was the forfeit of her undue anxiety. When shall we learn that it is God alone who really knows what is best for his people, and that, in all temporal affairs, the safest path for the Christian is to put a blank into the hands of his heavenly Father, that He may write in it what he will, while we are content to say from the heart, " It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him God." Here alone is our safety and our comfort : " Sweet to lie passive in God's hands, and know no will but his."

While the soul of Rachel was departing, her attendants endeavoured to cheer her, saying : " Fear not, thou shalt have this son also." But, like the wife of Phineas, " she answered not, neither did she regard it." Life was too quickly ebbing to permit her to rejoice even in the acquisition she had so long and so ardently desired. Weak and miserable are the comforters of the world when they endeavour to gladden the chamber of sickness, or the bed of death, by promises of worldly blessings, or the recollection of worldly advantages. Of what avail was it to the dying mother to be told, that she should leave behind her another little one to be tempest-tossed upon that ocean from which she was so fast receding ? Of what

avail is any thing that worldly friendship can suggest at such an hour? "*Fear not*:" the language of Rachel's friends is, indeed, the universal language at these seasons of terror and dismay; and too often the injunction, not of holy confidence, but of ignorance or presumption. For is there no rational ground of fear? Is it nothing that we are about to suffer that wrench which separates the body and the soul, that have been so long and such intimate companions? Is it nothing, that we are about to put off this mortal clothing, and to stand before the judgment-seat of Him, "to whom all hearts are open, and from whom no secrets are hid?" Are not these things fitting objects of fear? Who is there, carrying about with him a body of sin and death, who will deny it? To the worldling, this must be indeed a fearful, as to the disciple of our Lord, it must still be a most solemn hour. But blessed, for ever blessed be our Redeemer! He came "to deliver them who, through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage." He came, not only to draw the sting of death, but to remove the fear. We may now in safety adopt the language of Rachel's friends, and say to every true believer among you, Do you fear death? "*Fear not*." That Saviour to whose holy keeping you have committed your soul, has said, "I will redeem thee from death; O death, I will be thy plague." Do you fear the grave? "*Fear not*;" the same Saviour has said, "O grave, I will be thy destruction." It is no longer the impure and tainted sepulchre, but the bed perfumed by the body of Him who once himself lay there. The way to it is no longer a dark and untrodden passage, for the Lamb is the light thereof, and the print of his footsteps is visible throughout all its dreary windings. Do you fear the resurrection? "*Fear not*?" it is no more a vague uncertainty; for the unerring word of God has revealed, "If the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead, dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead, shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you." Do you fear the descent of "the great white throne," of which God's word has told us? "*Fear not*:"

the Judge who sits upon it is that dear and precious Saviour, "whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory: receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls." Do you fear the eternity which shall succeed? "Fear not;" it will not be too long for the enjoyment of the "inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven" for the redeemed of the Lord, and to be employed in his service, and to his glory.

LECTURE VII.

GENESIS XLV. part of 26th verse.

"And Jacob's heart fainted, for he believed them not."

THE chapter with which our observations commence this morning, viz., the 37th, open thus: "And Jacob dwelt in the land wherein his father was a stranger; in the land of Canaan." There is a peculiar emphasis in these words: "*Jacob dwelt*" as a resident in the land. Isaac had been content to be a stranger there. Jacob had become great, and wealthy, and powerful, and was no longer willing, as his father and his grandfather had been, "to sojourn" (so the Apostle to the Hebrews expresses it) "in the land of promise, as in a strange country;" one of the brightest evidences of their faith in God, and of their anxious expectations of that "city which hath foundations." But Jacob was beginning to settle himself in Canaan, not as his temporary resting-place, but his abiding home. This is precisely the state of mind which the god of this world is always desirous of inducing: if he can but succeed in tempting you to forget that this is not your rest; if he can but encourage you to throw all your heart, and energies, and affections, into the pleasures or business of this transitory scene: the "planting, and building, and marrying, and giving in marriage;" "the

sitting down to work, and the rising up only to play," of this temporary state of existence, his end is gained. Heaven is neglected; Christ is despised; God is forgotten; the soul sleeps—and who will venture to say that it shall awaken until the last trump of the Archangel proclaim the irrevocable doom—"Wo, wo unto you, for ye have received your consolation."

But blessed be the God of Jacob, this is a state from which He is continually, aye, daily, recalling his children. If the tree bear no fruit, does the careful husbandman give it up in despair? O no; he prunes it; he digs about it; he loosens the ground about its roots, to let in the refreshing shower and the invigorating sunshine. Thus also does the great Husbandman, when He beholds his children settling down in fruitless forgetfulness; He brings upon them some afflictive visitation, or some awakening providence, or, by what we term some accidental change of circumstances, He uproots them from the place in which they have long lived peaceably and at ease, and thus says aloud to the ear and to the heart, "Arise and depart, for this is not your rest." That such is assuredly the Almighty's method with his people, the experience of many among us will abundantly testify. But it is one of those important truths which do not depend merely on personal experience for their acceptance; it is a matter of express revelation in God's holy word. 'Thus saith the Lord, "Moab hath been at ease from his youth, and he hath settled on his lees, and hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel; therefore his taste remaineth in him, and his scent is not changed." How accurate a description of one, whose roots the Lord hath never shaken by affliction, or adversity, or change, and whose natural taste and feelings remain unaltered! Observe how the prophet proceeds: "Therefore, behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will send unto him wanderers, that shall cause him to wander, and shall empty his vessels, and shall break their bottles." So was it with Jacob; he had "settled upon his lees," and he was *dwelling* in the land in which he ought to have felt himself only a passing stranger.

My Christian brethren, if I address any who are falling into this too common and too dangerous a mistake ; any of you upon whom the world has smiled, and whom a long series of prosperous events, a course of uninterrupted health, or of domestic happiness, have tempted to establish yourself in false security here below, be timely warned by the dealings of the Almighty with the patriarch, how he will also deal with you. He will no more permit his children thus to *sleep* away their souls, than (as we have seen from former incidents in Jacob's life) He will permit them, unchecked, to *sin* them away. Our Lord has himself declared that He "stands at the door and knocks" by his ministers, by his Spirit, by his providences ; and be assured, that if you are a child of his, He will not cease to knock ; every stroke will be louder and harsher, and more appalling, until He has roused you from your lethargy, until you have opened to Him your whole heart, and received Him as your full and sufficient Saviour. Do not then, *content* yourself with a land in which the real people of God have always rejoiced to account themselves as strangers. Do not be in love with a world which is at enmity with God ; but as the Psalmist says, "delight thyself in the Lord," He alone can give, "and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart." Proceed we now to mark how God, in mercy, was about to exemplify this, in his treatment of the patriarch ; to break the cisterns which Jacob had hewn out for himself, but which could hold no water ; to empty the earthen vessels in which his soul delighted ; and, in this last stage of his pilgrimage, to compel him to wander into a strange country, and to finish his days in a foreign land.

The instructive and well known history of Joseph forms the comment upon this observation ; and how dexterously does the inspired historian prepare us for the event, even by the opening passage of that history—"Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children." Whenever the Almighty needs a rod to chasten us, our passions and affections, our own preferences and partialities, have always one at hand to offer him. God

was about to call Israel to remembrance ; a gentle blow would be unavailing ; it was to be given with a tender hand : but it must be sharp, that it must be acutely felt ; and heavy, that it may be long remembered. The Almighty does not take away Levi, or Judah, or Zebulon, the sons of the little-regarded Leah, but Joseph, the son of the tenderly-beloved Rachel ! her first-begotten son ; him whom Jacob loved more than all his children. — How often in the lives of God's people is this great lesson taught us, to be most jealous over the affection which we bestow upon created beings. It is to God alone, as revealed to you in the person of his dear Son, that your whole heart, and soul, and strength, may go out in the exercises of gratitude and love without excess, and without sin ; it is Him alone that you may love without measure and without reserve ; for He has promised, that the more you love Him, the more you shall be loved of his Father ; the more He himself will love you, and the more clearly, the more perfectly He will manifest himself to you. You cannot be too often cautioned, to permit none to divide with God the sovereignty of your heart ; be it a wife, a husband, a child, a parent, or a friend, whom it delights you to array in every fancied excellency, and then to worship the work which your own hands have made, be assured you are but adorning the victim for the sacrifice, and accelerating the blow from which your soul would shrink. You are, perhaps, withdrawing, day by day, from God, all the highest feelings and affections of your bosom, and are fondly hanging them around the earthly object of your love ; but are you aware of what you are doing ? do you at all anticipate the inevitable result ? You are merely erecting a mark, at which the unerring shaft shall be pointed, and when the bow of God's vengeance, or it may be of love—for he strikes in mercy, and wounds only to heal—when that bow of God shall be bent, the first and sharpest arrow from the quiver will be pointed at the mark which you yourself have set up, and your idol will infallibly be levelled in the dust. All that remained to Jacob of his once too dearly-beloved Joseph, was “ the coat of many

colours," the sad memorial of his unjust partiality ; all that will remain to you to soothe the pangs of memory, will be the recollection of the departed, embittered by the remembrance of your own guilty preferences for the creature above the Creator.

Years passed away, and while Jacob was thus refining in the furnace of affliction, many vicissitudes of light and shadow were falling upon his path, and the Almighty was preparing for him a place of peaceful repose in which to close the years of his pilgrimage ; at the very time that Jacob was mourning the loss of Joseph, and refusing to be comforted, God was with this same Joseph, elevating him by steps the most remarkable and improbable, from a dungeon to a throne, and placing him in the "second chariot" of the land of Egypt. It was then that those deeply interesting scenes took place with which we have *all*, from our childhood, been acquainted, and which have so often excited our early commiseration, and bade our infant sorrows flow. For who is there among us, upon whose memory those scenes have not been indelibly impressed ? Who has not delighted to trace the ascending path of the virtuous and godly Joseph, and to behold him rising, whether in a prison or a court, to the most confidential employments, and the highest offices, because he feared God and walked in his ways ? Who has not traced with deepening interest every passage of that instructive tale, the famine in Canaan, driving Joseph's brethren into Egypt to fulfil unwittingly his dream, and to bow themselves down before his footstool ? The money and the silver cup discovered in the mouth of their sacks ; their conscience-stricken exclamation, " We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us and we would not hear, therefore is this distress come upon us ?" And who has not wept over the bereavements of the patriarch, when exclaiming, in all the wretchedness of utter desolation, " Joseph is *not*, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away : all these things are against me ?" Our limits forbid us to dwell upon scenes so familiar to our hearts as these : but how can we pass over without a

comment, the faithless repinings of Jacob, "*all* these things are against me?" Had he followed the Lord for an hundred and thirty years, and lived upon the richest bounties of his providence and grace, and did he really believe at last that any dispensation of the Almighty could be against him? Well might the Psalmist say, "Lord! what is man, that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man, that thou so regardest him?" Surely, nothing but infinite condescension and infinite love, could have ever borne with such faithlessness and ingratitude. In all this trying visitation which so depressed the patriarch, there was not literally a single circumstance which the Almighty was not overruling for good. To us, my brethren, to whom all is now disclosed, this is indeed perfectly evident; we can easily demonstrate, that every subject which Jacob selected as a matter for repining, was in reality a subject of thanksgiving and rejoicing. Hear only the words of his lamentation, and how easily they are refuted. "Joseph is not," says the desponding patriarch. We might reply, because God has removed him for a short time from your family, to enable him by his advancement to provide against the famine by which you would otherwise have inevitably perished. But "Simeon is not"—he has remained in Egypt a comfortable inmate in his brother's house. But "they will take Benjamin away!" yes, to hasten the declaration which is to comfort your widowed heart, and to bring your long-lost son once more to your bosom. We acknowledge that Jacob could not have known that these things were so, but then he also could not have known the contrary; and if faith had had her perfect work, that "faith which is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen," he would not have viewed only the dark side of the picture, he would have reasoned, as he had before done when his faith was in fuller exercise, that because God *had* blessed him, God assuredly *would* bless him, and he would not, while in the hands of a merciful God, have so despairingly exclaimed, "All these things are against me!"

My Christian brethren, can we thus animadvert upon the

conduct of the patriarch, without hearing the still small voice of conscience whispering to ourselves, "Thou art the man?" This has been thine own failing, and thine own sin. Whose heart does not plead guilty to the charge? who has not in the first hours of affliction felt, and spoken, and acted, as if all were lost, as if hope itself were fled, as if, "God had forgotten to be gracious, and shut up his loving-kindness in displeasure?" If some bright seraph from the world above had stood by us in these our moments of trouble, or of sorrow, or of despondency, one of those perfect beings whose angel eyes can view the whole of the dispensations of which we are permitted for the present only to see the dark and cheerless commencement, how might he have convicted *us*, as we have convicted *Jacob*; how might he have convinced us that not a single friend, or comfort, or blessing "*is not*," unless the removal, minister in some certain measure to our eternal benefit; that while we are saying, "all these things are against us," he would know that they were all working together for good; that though "Joseph be not, and Simeon be not, and Benjamin be taken away," not one blow has been struck, not one privation has been inflicted, not one inroad upon our happiness has been made, which mercy could have spared, or which could have been withheld without imparting real, lasting injury to our immortal souls. Learn then to trust God, even when you are unable to trace Him; and if the dispensation be so dark that no ray of love, no gleam of mercy appear to penetrate it; if blow follow blow in quick and fearful succession, and one blessing after another be removed, and one hope after another wither, be assured that what "thou knowest not now, thou shalt know hereafter," and instead of saying with the desponding Jacob, "all these things are against me," say with the confiding Job, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust him;" and let the winds of adversity, the more bleakly and coldly they blow, only drive you the closer to that bosom, where every child of God finds shelter and support.

The time would fail me were I to tell of all the minute and interesting details which issued in Joseph's acknowledgment

of himself, his pardon of his repentant brethren, and his affectionate message to his aged parent. It is of more importance to ourselves, and more intimately connected with the biography we are prosecuting, to observe the patriarch's conduct at the joyful termination of his long and grievous trial. We read then, that his sons "went up out of Egypt, and came into the land of Canaan, unto Jacob their father, and told him, saying, Joseph is yet alive, and he is governor over all the land of Egypt; and Jacob's heart fainted, for he believed them not." How beautiful and how touching a picture! Yet even here, how do the infirmities of our nature manifest themselves! The intelligence is now too good to be true. Jacob's heart fainted, and he could not believe it. He had never hesitated to believe when the intelligence was most heart-rending and afflicting: when all things were against him, he was ready and willing to believe all, nay more than all, that could be told him. He did not for a moment doubt the severity of God; he reserved these misgivings only for the mercies of his heavenly Father. How accurate a picture of the operations of the human mind in higher things; so ready to receive all the darker shades with which men portray the features of the Almighty. So "slow of heart to believe" even his own declarations when they speak only of tenderness, forgiveness, and love. How often do we behold this manifested upon a bed of sickness, or in the chamber of death! nay, is it not sometimes visible in the very temple in which we are now assembled, and among yourselves? When we, the ministers of Christ, come to you in the name of our divine Master, and desire to present you with the freest and the richest offers of his Gospel; when we endeavour to approach you, "as though God did beseech you by us," to be reconciled to him - when we strive to tell you, what no tongue can worthily tell, of the unsearchable riches of Christ, of the free, and full, and finished salvation which he worked out for you, and earnestly entreat you to "receive the atonement," to accept the free and proffered gifts, and to enter at once into fellowship with the divine and affectionate Giver, that your sins may be

forgiven, your incapacities removed, your inheritance secured, that you may thus go on your way rejoicing, what is the feeling with which you too often hear us? Is it not with this which Jacob manifested? There is a degree of distrust lingering in your bosom. It cannot be that the way of salvation is so simple! That the love of God in Christ Jesus is so abundant! It would be presumptuous in me to apply such offers to myself! Is it not thus that your hearts faint through unbelief? Christian brethren, be assured, that even under this, its most plausible aspect, even when thus disguised in the garment of humility, unbelief can never be gratifying to God! He who believes God the most readily, and accepts his offers the most willingly, and embraces the promised privileges the most closely and unreservedly, be assured he honours God most. For however we may imagine the contrary, it is simply unbelief which lies at the bottom of our hesitation, and tempts us to reject the proffered inheritance, because we doubt the voice which offers it. If your heart faint within you because the salvation of Jesus Christ is too simple, too gratuitous, too abundant to be true, let your earnest prayer be, "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief!" and relax not your endeavours, cease not from this prayer, until you have, by the grace given unto you, received all that the Gospel has spoken, and taken the Saviour, as your own full and sufficient Saviour, to your heart. This it is which can alone give peace to the wounded conscience and rest to the troubled soul—the reposing it for time and for eternity upon the one great oblation which the Lord Jesus Christ has offered, and which his Spirit is ever ready to apply to all who seek it.

Jacob's incredulity (natural as it unquestionably was from all that had preceded) was conquered not by the arguments of his children, but by the affectionate and delightful messages of his absent son, and was soon succeeded by the most sincere sensations of gratitude and joy. "They told him all the words of Joseph which he had said unto them; and when he saw the wagons which Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of Jacob

their father revived, and Israel said ; It is enough, Joseph my son is yet alive, I will go and see him before I die."

Christian brethren, may the remains of incredulity in your bosom be extinguished by the same gentle means, eradicated by the same tender method. Unbelief does not usually yield to argument ; " With the *heart* man believeth unto righteousness," says the scripture, and experience fully justifies it : May the words which you are privileged to hear from time to time, not merely convince your understanding, but by the Holy spirit of power and love, be instrumental in softening and changing your heart ; the words not of man, but of Christ himself, inviting you who thirst to come without money and without price unto him and drink ; calling you who labour and are heavy laden, and affectionately assuring you that he will give rest ; may these his own declarations, accompanied, as they will be to all who seek it, by the felt and acknowledged presence of Him who spake them, fully satisfy you that the invitations of your Redeemer, that the offers of his purchased inheritance, are not too free, not too bountiful, not too unrestricted, to be most literally and most blessedly true. And as the spirit of Jacob revived when he beheld the wagons which were to convey him to his son, so may it be your privilege, that by all the dispensations which your Lord shall send to bring you nearer to himself, your spirits may be revived, sustained, and comforted ; and that in the very hour of your departure from the country in which you are travelling, to the fair land where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God, the language of your soul may be, " It is enough : I am willing to take my journey, not merely to leave a land of famine and of trouble, or to throw off this mortal body which is for ever harassed by sorrow or tormented by sin," but with the Apostle, " I am willing rather to be absent from the body that I may be present with the Lord." " Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation."

LECTURE VIII.

GENESIS XLVII. 8, 9.

“And Pharaoh said unto Jacob, How old art thou? And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage.”

WE are this morning to review the closing scene of the life of that patriarch who has formed the subject of the short course of lectures in which we have been engaged. Let us, before we do so, return our sincere and humble thanks to the Giver of all good, for that measure of his grace with which He has been mercifully pleased to bless the undertaking, and for permitting us, contrary almost to our expectation, thus to bring it uninterruptedly to a conclusion. Most inadequately as this instructive subject has been treated, we would still venture to believe that the divine blessing has not been entirely withheld; that some among you may have been led, while meditating upon the life of this man of God, to search the more earnestly, to scrutinize the more carefully your own bosoms, to observe whether your worldly comforts are leading you, as they appear in the course of this history too often to have led the patriarch, further from God: whether your trials and your afflictions have been the painful, but salutary means of bringing you nearer to Him; whether you, like Jacob, are fully penetrated with a deep sense of your own unworthiness and sin, are trusting to the blood of the everlasting covenant and to that alone, for your acceptance with God, and as strangers and pilgrims on the earth, are seeking a better country, and a more enduring inheritance.

If there be any among you who have been thus influenced by the subject in which we have been engaged, to look more seriously than you have hitherto done into your own life and conversation; and if, when comparing them with this holy man

of old, you find there is a sad and fearful difference—that the spiritual religion of the Bible differs widely from that which you have embraced—that the true and living faith is a far more influential grace than you have found it—that the consistent, self-denying obedience of this holy man was of a very different nature from your own—that the love of God in Christ Jesus brought with it into his bosom such peace as passeth man's understanding, such joy and strong consolation as you have never known, we should, as a last, as a parting request, ask this at your hands—that you would “search the scriptures” daily for yourselves, with carefulness, thoughtfulness, and prayer, and, with the Bereans of old, “see whether these things be so.” Take nothing upon the credit of mere human teachers, but bring every opinion, every doctrine, every word of the preacher to the touchstone of divine truth: “Try the spirits whether they are of God,” and may the Holy Spirit of light and grace direct you in your search, until you have indeed discovered the pearl of great price; until you have found Him of whom Moses and the prophets did write; and until, by the grace which is given you, He, even the Lord Jesus whom we preach, “is made unto you wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.”

We resume the history in which we are engaged, at that point of time when Jacob, having received with gratitude and joy the tidings of his long-lost son, had formed the immediate resolution, “I will go and see him before I die.” Doubtless the delight of the anticipated meeting was the predominant feeling in the mind of the patriarch at this period, yet must there have mingled with it some strong sensations of regret upon bidding farewell to scenes endeared to him by the blessings, the mercies, and even the very sorrows through which he had passed. In Canaan he had spent the days of his infancy and his youth; there he had been elevated from the poor and houseless wanderer to the wealthy and powerful patriarch; and, of far greater importance, there the Almighty had first revealed Himself to him as a covenant God, and had recognized him as

his servant, his child, his heir ! Neither was the land endeared to Jacob only by these important circumstances : it was hallowed also by many sorrowful and painful recollections. In Canaan was the burial-place of his fond and partial mother ; there he had closed the eyes of his father ; and there also he had deposited the wife of his bosom. Whatever, therefore, may have been the joy with which the patriarch looked towards Egypt, there was sufficient in the land which he was leaving to soberize his anticipations, and to send him in these moments of happiness to the same throne of grace which he had so often visited in trouble and affliction. It is deeply interesting to the Christian to observe that it had this effect, that before Jacob quitted the land of Canaan, as we are expressly told, even at Bersheba, the border town, he not only betook himself to prayer, but he “ offered sacrifice unto the God of his father Isaac.” That is, he once more, in a specific act, declared his own utter unworthiness, by thus not presuming to approach the Almighty without a propitiatory offering ; and he again demonstrated to his assembled household, that whether in adversity or prosperity, in sorrow or in joy, he was equally devoted to the Lord, and equally dependent for his acceptance upon that ever blessed Redeemer, of whom the sacrifices which Jacob offered were the acknowledged types.

Most encouraging was the reception Jacob met with from the Lord, viz., “ I will go down with thee into Egypt.” Identically the same promise of the divine presence and protection, now that Jacob was rich and increased in goods, and surrounded by a family of threescore and ten souls, as he had before received when he lay at Bethel, with the ground for his bed and with the stones for his pillow, a destitute and solitary wanderer. He who knows all our weakness, well knows that though we may *seek* him most when depressed by poverty or affliction, we do not *need* him less when elated by abundance or success. If God be not with us, if he withdraw his protecting hand from about our path, or his Holy Spirit from our heart, all the

wealth of Egypt will not make us rich, and all the joys of earth will leave us destitute and comfortless as they found us.

Under the divine guidance, Jacob performed in safety his long and wearisome journey, and (according to the promise of the Almighty) was blessed by the reunion with his favourite son. Very simple, and yet very affecting is the inspired historian's account of that meeting. "And Joseph made ready his chariot, and went up to meet Israel his father, to Goshen, and presented himself unto him, and he fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while." It is delightful to observe, that a long residence in the cold and noxious atmosphere of a court had neither chilled the filial affection of Joseph, nor destroyed his reverential respect for his parent. Although the second personage in Egypt, Joseph tarries not his father's arrival, but goes forth respectfully and dutifully to meet him upon the journey. Would that, at the present day, my brethren, such examples of filial duty were less unfrequent! A duty which, next to our duty to God, claims most imperatively the attention of the Christian. Vain, most vain and delusive, is every profession of religion, which does not evidence its reality by shedding its hallowed influences over all the relative duties of life; which does not demonstrate that the truly Christian son and daughter are not only the most consistent and obedient worshippers of their heavenly Father, but, at the same time, the most cheerfully, most respectfully affectionate children of their earthly parents. These are among the fairest fruits by which men discern the good tree. Would that every one of our younger hearers would mark this most attentively! For be assured that you cannot honour God more than by honouring those whom He thus, by the laws of nature, has placed over you. We have sometimes seen (and we have seen it with grief and disappointment) an increasing acquaintance with the great truths of religion producing a different effect, and have beheld the child using the first season of spiritual light to discern and descry the faults, or omissions, or ignorance of a parent

Be assured this is no genuine fruit of the religion of Him whose subjugation to his earthly parents, and whose dying solicitude for the welfare of his mother, were among the brightest traits of his all-perfect character. Never can the constraining love of Christ shed abroad in your bosom, find a more delightful or appropriate exercise, than while influencing you to watch over the declining years or to soothe the parting hours of those who ministered to your wants before you were able to express them, and who loved you with the most unwearied affection at a time when you were known only, and loved only, by God and by themselves.

The first incident recorded by the inspired historian, after the reunion between the aged patriarch and his favourite son, is of a very pleasing and edifying nature, no less than the introduction of Jacob to the king of Egypt, who had been so long the patron and the friend of Joseph. The particulars of this meeting, while they afford us a striking picture of the simplicity of manners long since gone by, present us also with a lesson which will never be out of date, and which we beseech the Holy Spirit of God to impart, not only to every one of us here present, but to our children and our children's children, to the "third and fourth generation."

"Joseph," says the historian, "brought in Jacob his father, and set him before Pharaoh, and Jacob blessed Pharaoh. And Pharaoh said unto Jacob, How old art thou? And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, 'The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years; few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage.'" Such was the answer of the patriarch! And is this the manner in which an aged man of God looks back upon the years that are fled? Are one hundred and thirty years, when life is drawing to a close, considered but a *few*? and is such a life as Jacob's spoken of as *evil*? How different then is human life, when looked back upon from the eminence of threescore years? how widely different from that immeasurable

long, and gay, and flowery road which it appears at its commencement ! Yet this was the testimony of a wise, a prosperous, a pious, and, as life is constituted, a happy man. He denominates life, “a pilgrimage ;” he reckons it by the “days of the years” which are fled, and he pronounces them “few and evil !”

We have, in the course of these Lectures, endeavoured frequently, plainly, and, we trust, faithfully and affectionately, to address our younger brethren upon those points in the life or character of Jacob, which appeared more peculiarly applicable to their own ; permit us, then, upon the present occasion, to address a different class, or rather permit the *patriarch*, for his words require neither addition nor explanation ; permit one older than yourselves to address those among you who are advanced in life, who have seen its brightest and its happiest hours, and are now entering upon the vale of years, the last short passage which precedes the tomb, and the eternity awaiting you ! Listen, while one, upon whose head the snows of six score years had settled, assures you of this incontestible truth, that “few and evil are the days of the years” of the longest and the holiest life on earth. How admirable a subject for self-examination and private reflection ! Carefully inquire of your own bosoms, whether the estimate of life which you have formed be similar to this of the patriarch ? whether it so influence you, that you are the more actively employing your remaining faculties and years for the honour of God, because they are “few ;” and the more deeply bewailing the days that are passed, and the more fervently seeking forgiveness for them, through the blood of Jesus, because they are “evil.” This is a solemn inquiry ; God grant that it may meet with that reception in your bosoms which it merits. “The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness.” But do not, for the sake of Him who died for you, do not trifle in ascertaining that this is the case with yourselves ; that you are “in the way of righteousness,” the Lord’s highway, through which “the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to

Zion with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads ; when they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." A life of industry, a life of honour and integrity, a life of success and of applause among men, however long, or (speaking after the manner of men) however irreproachable, will not stand the scrutinizing eye of your God. Essentially necessary as such a life unquestionably is as the fruits of your faith, if you are looking to it to usurp the place of a justifying righteousness on the great day of account, we warn you, that you will find it worthless and insufficient : it will not, it cannot avert the condemnation which a broken law will bring down on your devoted heads. Every other righteousness but the righteousness of your Redeemer will, as the meritorious cause of the salvation, be cast aside as a tattered and polluted garment, in the day when the King shall come in to see the guests, and when much that has been highly esteemed among men, will be found to be but "abomination in the sight of God." Earnestly search, therefore, whether the righteousness of Christ has been applied to your heart by a true and justifying faith ; and whether, in obedience to his commands, you are living such a holy, harmless, unworldly life, as becomes those who are not their own, but His who has bought them with a price, even the price of His own precious blood, poured forth on the accursed tree, in full and ample satisfaction for all the demands of an offended God. See whether you are forming a right estimate of time and of eternity, of heaven and hell. Do not cling to that which you cannot hold, and which is even now trembling in your nerveless grasp. Seek something more durable than even the earth on which you live ; seek a real saving interest in Him whom rightly to know is life eternal, and whom to love and to enjoy forms the delight of heaven, and the never-wearying subject of its harps. But if the urging you to look forward to those bright scenes beyond your present horizon do not influence you, look back with Jacob on the way which you have travelled, and see if sin and sorrow have not stamped the indelible character of evil on every mile of your journey.

“Your fathers, where are they?” the companions who entered life with you, whither are they gone? Some who were stronger, many who were younger than you, have been cut off: and if you cast a careful glance along the way which you have travelled, you will find it but a line of cypresses and tombs; mourning and death have left their traces on the road, intermingled only with mercies and sin.

My beloved brethren; these great truths address themselves not to the aged alone, but to each and to all. Whether we confess it, or confess it not, such is the melancholy retrospect. Our days at the best are evil; at the longest, they are few. They are drawing to a close; and, whether prepared or unprepared, we are moving rapidly forward. The last stage of our journey opens upon us; we cannot delay—we cannot for a single hour, procrastinate its conclusion. And what a conclusion will it be to those among us who are only alive to the labours or the pleasures of the journey, but dead to what awaits them upon their journey’s end! We dare not attempt to describe the termination of their path. To the heart of a Christian, its progress is sufficiently appalling: to mark the careless, thoughtless mien of those who are travelling on the broad road which leads to destruction; to see the votaries of folly and of pleasure, while good men are praying for them, and the very angels of heaven are weeping at their obduracy and impenitence, and it may be, the great and blessed Intercessor himself striving for them before the throne of his heavenly Father, to see them alone, throughout all the creation of God, the only things which neither minister to his glory, nor hymn his praise, nor deprecate his unquenchable wrath, but travel on happily and unconcernedly, making a mock at sin, denying the Lord who bought them, and despising the proffered joys of heaven. To mark the daily progress of a thoughtless, careless sinner, is one of the most painful trials of the Christian; but, to describe the termination is as impossible as it would be agonizing and appalling. What human tongue can tell—what finite apprehension conceive the despair, the remorse, the agony of that tremendous

day, when the Lord shall “look out” in anger on those who have defied his wrath, disdained his commands, neglected his Son, when, in the plain but emphatic language of the psalmist, “The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the people that forget God.”

Proceed we to the concluding scene of the history before us. “And the time drew nigh,” says the inspired historian, “that Israel must die.” Let us, then, in imagination, enter the tent of the departing patriarch: let us draw round his dying bed. We have followed him through the chequered scenes of his eventful pilgrimage: we have seen how a man of God can live—let us now behold how he can die. What a calm scene of resignation and of holy confidence do we witness! There is, indeed, nothing of triumph or of rapture, but all bespeaks the last hours of one at peace with God, and God with him; one, as he declared himself, who “had been redeemed from all evil.” We behold the aged saint, like a full shock of corn coming in its season, waiting to be removed into the imperishable garner. Joseph and his sons are at the bed’s head, and all the sons of Jacob are gathered round their departing father. Now does the dying patriarch act faith upon the promises of God for the last time. Yet a few short moments, and faith will for ever cease—exchanged for the perfect vision and the fullest enjoyment. Yet to these last hours has the apostle to the Hebrews borne his testimony, when he said, “By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph, and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff.”

“Now the eyes of Israel were dim for age, so that he could not see; and Joseph brought his sons near unto him; and he kissed them, and embraced them,” “and he blessed Joseph, and said—God, before whom my fathers, Abraham and Isaac, did walk, the God which led me all my life long unto this day, the Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads;” and having then proceeded to bless his assembled family in a strain of prophecy which has excited the wonder of the church of God, even to the present hour, he thus interrupted his dis-

course, to express shortly, but emphatically, the last strong feelings which filled his dying bosom : “ I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord.”

Death was no new subject to him ; salvation not an untried theme ; the grave no strange country ; heaven not an unlooked-for home. He had ‘ waited ’ for the Angel of the Covenant, who had redeemed him, even “ the Angel Jehovah,” the Lord Jesus Christ, to send his messenger to summon him into the eternal presence ; and the language of Jacob’s heart had long been this—“ I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord.”

All the ardent expectation of a new convert, who is longing to depart and be with Christ, tempered by all the patient resignation of the aged Christian, who knows, if the Almighty make him wait, it is for some wise and gracious purpose, and feels assured that God’s times are always the best times. It was in this state of meek and peaceful reliance on Him “ in whom he had believed,” that the aged patriarch might have said with Job, “ All the days of my appointed time will I wait till my change come.” That change was now at hand, even at the door—a fearful change for the ungodly, a solemn change for all. We read, “ When Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people,” breathing his placid soul into the bosom of him he loved. Thus, “ the work of righteousness was peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever.” Who can witness it, who can hear of it, even as we do this day, after an interval of four thousand years, without a secret aspiration arising from his heart, “ Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his !”

Christian brethren, we trust we are addressing many who could, at this moment, say with the patriarch, “ I also have waited for thy salvation, O Lord ;” or, in the still plainer language of the apostle to the Thessalonians, I “ wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered me from the wrath to come.” How great and

blessed are your privileges, if you are thus “waiting” to reign with him in glory, upon whom you have lived by faith on earth. Behold with what manner of love the Father hath loved you, that such a promise should be your own ! “What manner of persons ought you then to be in all holy conversation and godliness.” Live worthy of those unspeakable privileges ; cherish the grace which God has so abundantly bestowed upon you, in uniting you to Christ your living head ; avoid every thing which would sully the brightness of your faith, or damp the ardour of your grateful love ; live near to him, out of whose fulness you receive grace for grace, and suffer nothing which this world can offer to intimidate you, or to allure you to live contrary to your convictions, or to deny Him before men, who is willing to confess you before the angels of God.

“Few and evil the days of the years of your pilgrimage” still may be ; many may be the crosses to be carried, the disappointments to be borne, the troubles to be endured, but He who has given you his Son, is with Him also freely giving you all things. ‘These light afflictions are but for a moment ; the heaviness is but for night ; joy, everlasting joy, will come upon the wings of the approaching morning. Only relax not in your efforts ; act not as if you thought you had “already attained, either were already perfect ;” but with the apostle, “forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” The struggles of the conflict will soon be over—every enemy vanquished, every battle won ; the dust shall be wiped from your brow, the tears from your eyes ; and the bright crown to which you now are looking, shall be your own, when you shall, through the alone merits of your Redeemer, sit down with him of whom we have been speaking, with Abraham, with Isaac and JACOB, amidst the fulness of imperishable joys, in your Father’s kingdom, and upon your Redeemer’s throne.

LECTURES

ON THE

HISTORY OF ELISHA.

LECTURE I.

1 KINGS XIX. 16.

“Elisha the son of Shaphat, of Abel-meholah, shalt thou anoint to be Prophet in thy room.”

It has been my endeavour, on former occasions, at this season, to bring before my hearers some of the most striking features in the lives of many of the eminent servants of God. Of these we have reviewed together the history of the father of the faithful, of the most remarkable of the patriarchs, of the most zealous of the disciples of Jesus, of the chief of the apostles, and lastly, of HIM, who as far excels them all, as the sun in the firmament outshines the lesser lights by which he is surrounded, even our Divine Lord and Saviour Jesus[†] Christ. There is still one class from which we have never yet selected an example, a class as deeply interesting and as highly instructive as any to which we have referred, viz., the prophets of God. From this, therefore, I have chosen the subject of the present discourses, praying, that while treating upon it, I may be guided by the Spirit of Him of whom Moses and the prophets did write, and may discover Him even amidst the dim and shadowy types of the olden dispensation, and present Him to you, in the course of our narrative, with all His blessed promises, and His life-giving doctrines, as clearly through the

vista of a thousand years, as his disciples once beheld him amidst the radiance of Mount Tabor, or the last bright parting scene upon Mount Olivet.

The prophets of Israel were a very remarkable and peculiar race of men ; living, generally, in poor and mean habitations ; contented with a bare sufficiency to supply their daily wants ; rejecting cheerfully an abundance of this world's goods, and yet standing before kings and princes as the accredited ambassadors of the Most High, declaring unhesitatingly His counsels, and denouncing unshrinkingly His judgments and His woes.

Perhaps among them all, there is none who more awakens our sympathies, and interests our hearts than the Prophet Elisha. He is not indeed ranked among the higher order of seers, who were taught by the Spirit of God to foretell the great events of far-distant times. When he speaks, it is not in the language of sublimity and power which marks the courtly Isaiah ; neither is it with the tender and affecting pathos which belongs so peculiarly to the priestly Jeremiah ; nor with the deep, vehement, and fervid eloquence that distinguishes Ezekiel ; very little of what Elisha has said is recorded ; his life was one of actions, not of words ; and while we are following his footsteps and listening to his voice, we shall much more frequently be reminded of our own blessed and divine Saviour, than of any of the saints and worthies who preceded Him.

Thus, for example, we shall find that Elisha was not insensible to the endearments of home, the attachments and ties of friendship, and the pure and hallowed joys of ministering to the consolation of the mourner, and partaking of the sorrows of the destitute.

The first mention made of this prophet in Holy Writ is conveyed in the words of the text.

The course of that great and extraordinary man, Elijah the Tishbite, was drawing towards its close, and the Spirit of the Lord had revealed to him, that before his departure hence, he was to anoint Hazael to be king over Syria, and Jehu to be king over Israel ; and then closes this communication from on high,

with the words we have read to you, "And Elisha the son of Shaphat, of Abel-meholah, shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room."

Perhaps to one upon whose heart the Holy Spirit of God had shed a less powerful and hallowing influence, who had lived less continually in the service of God, and enjoyed less habitually the closest and most intimate communion with his Divine Master, such a commission would have been one of unmingled painfulness; but the prophet had too long dwelt among the unseen realities of a holier and a happier state, to feel any thing but delight at the summons, which was to place him once and for ever in the absolute enjoyment of them.

That he was to anoint his successor, that he was, without delay, to fill up the post which he had so long and so toilsomely occupied, that he was shortly to hear the words of his Divine Master, saying, "Come up hither," were to him but so many calls to gratitude and praise.

Happy is he among ourselves, brethren, who can realize something of such a feeling. Happy are you who are so living, that if you were told at this moment to nominate your successor in all that now most engrosses your thoughts, your time, or your affections, could, without a struggle, place in stranger hands the occupations, duties, beings, nearest to your heart, and feel content, and more than content, to resign all at God's bidding, and to forsake all, for God's own presence, and kingdom and glory.

Although, therefore, this was the last command given to Elijah, it was the first obeyed. For we are told by the inspired historian, "So he departed hence, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was ploughing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth; and Elijah passed by him, and cast his mantle upon him."

How remarkable an interview! Not a word appears to have been spoken; the prophet had hastened onward to fulfil his important commission; he had travelled from Mount Horeb, which was about one hundred and fifty miles from Abel-meho-

lah, and when he arrives at the end of this long and wearisome journey, he finds the object of his search, not wearing soft* clothing and dwelling in king's houses, but employed in arduous and heavy labour, following the plough.

How little do those men know of religion who wonder at such an incident. Never are we more likely to hear the voice of God's good Spirit speaking effectually to the heart, than when fulfilling conscientiously and industriously the duties of an honourable and innocent employ. Yet is it astonishing how much ignorance exists upon this subject; one man thinks his worldly duties quite incompatible with spiritual ordinances; another imagines that if he were freed from these impediments, then and not till then, he should be enabled to run the way of God's commandments; how few practically feel, what is unquestionably the truth, that a man is never more religiously employed—never, perhaps, more acceptably to God—than when he is “not slothful in business, but fervent in spirit, serving the Lord,” and carrying out the dictates of inspiration, and fulfilling the high behests of eternity, amidst the anxious cares and duties of time.

It is recorded in the life of the excellent Philip Henry, father of the commentator, that one day calling upon a tanner in his parish, he found him so busily employed in tanning a hide, that he was not aware of his approach until he gave him a slight tap on the back; he started, and looking behind him, blushed. “Sir,” said he, “I am ashamed you should find me thus.” Philip Henry replied, “Let Christ when he comes find me so doing.” “What,” said the man, “doing thus?” “Yes,” rejoined his minister, “faithful in the duties of my calling.”

No sooner had Elijah cast his prophet's mantle upon the herdsman of Abel-meholah, than influenced, no doubt, by the silent but all-prevailing voice of the Spirit of God, “made willing in the day of God's power,” Elisha understands the significant action, receives it at once as a call to the prophetic

*Matt. xi. 8.

office, and hesitates not a moment at the sacrifices it requires, or the duties it enjoins.

Instantly, as we are told, "he left the oxen and ran after Elijah." Twelve yoke of oxen were ploughing before him, eleven servants labouring with him in the field, which was in all probability his property, as the oxen and that which pertained to them evidently were, yet is he not for one moment impeded by the abundance of this world's goods; he remains not even to conclude the work upon which he is engaged, but follows at once his master and his guide.

Such, at least, as regarded every worldly impediment, was the conduct of Elisha; but there were ties more powerfully binding upon his heart than the possessions of earth; ties which Elijah indeed appears never to have known, and which perhaps he could scarcely estimate; yet were they neither unknown nor unfelt by Him whose earthly parent pondered in her heart his earliest sayings, and divided even on the cross his latest thoughts. "Let me, I pray thee," said Elisha, "kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee." And he said unto him, "Go back again; for what have I done to thee?" I have done nothing which should break these ties, I have done nothing to fetter thine own free-will, or to force a reluctant compliance. Follow as the Spirit of God shall lead thee, the result will be rightly and wisely ordered.

"So he returned back from him," and having paid that parting tribute of respect and affection to his parents, so justly due to them, having shown that the strongest aspirations after heaven are perfectly consistent with the holy affections of earth, and having feasted the people with the oxen which he no longer needed, to mark, perhaps, the cheerfulness and alacrity with which he was thus surrendering all for God, "he arose, and went after Elijah, and ministered unto him."

The earthly course of this remarkable man, however, was, as we have seen, now drawing towards its close, for the Lord had determined to "take up Elijah into heaven by a whirl-

wind ;”* in vain did he, when he felt his departure was at hand, entreat Elisha to leave him ; in vain did he urge him to tarry at each of the different places through which they passed ; the answer of his devoted follower to the thrice-repeated request was still the same, “As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee ?”

So they proceeded together from Gilgal to Bethel, and from Bethel to Jericho, and from Jericho to Jordan, until they stood together upon the banks of that mysterious river whose stream had separated when touched by the feet of those who, in former days, had borne the ark of the Lord, and whose waters were now about to be the subject of a second miracle, as wonderful, if not as imposing, as the first. For, no sooner did Elijah take his mantle, and with it smite the waters, than they were divided hither and thither, and they went over on dry ground.

The river Jordan, that river which has so often been made a type of the last awful passage from time to eternity, now was crossed, and as the prophet stood upon the opposite shore, waiting only for the chariot of fire which was to conduct him thence, he must have felt almost divested of humanity, and already a member of that heavenly choir which surrounds the throne. Who can read, and who can hear of the position of the prophet, at that moment, without feeling something nearly allied to envy of the fate of him who, of all mankind, was thus alone so highly honoured ? who can resist the natural petition which arises in his heart, Would that the waters of Jordan might be divided thus for me, that I also might escape this fearful passage ; that I might pass over dryshod, where so many are merged in the deep and rapid stream. But, brethren, this is the language of faithlessness and distrust. All, and more than all, that was vouchsafed to Elijah, is, if you are the children of God, promised and ensured to you.

The streams of Jordan shall not indeed become dry land at your approach, but there is One who has declared, “When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee ; and through

the rivers, they shall not overflow thee.”* There is One who has said, “I am the resurrection and the life; whosoever liveth and believeth in me, shall never die: believest thou this?” If so, be of good courage, your footsteps shall not sink in those deep waters; though they dry not up at your approach, they shall do more, they shall sustain you, they shall not bend beneath your weight while you are crossing them in the footsteps of Him, and leaning upon His arm, whose “rod and whose staff shall comfort you.”

Never, we may confidently assert, never was any child of God lost in that dark stream; many have sorely struggled there, many have been called to cross it, in much tribulation; bodily pain, mental anguish, spiritual darkness, have all combined to cloud and terrify the soul; yet is the language of one and all of those who have preceded us, as they stand rejoicing on the opposite bank, the voice of victory and triumph, “We overcame by the blood of the Lamb.”

Let yours, then, be the humble confidence of “God’s dear children;” do not permit a fear or a doubt of its fulfilment to intervene, while offering this most touching petition of our Burial Service, which finds a responsive chord in every breast, “Spare us, Lord, most holy, O God most mighty, O holy and merciful Saviour, thou most worthy Judge eternal, suffer us not, at our last hour, for any pains of death, to fall from thee.”

And now the prophets, having crossed the river, while the few and precious moments remained, before the fiery chariot should appear, engaged in deeply interesting discourse, of which the following only has been bequeathed to us: “Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I can do for thee, before I be taken away from thee.” What a test of all that was in the newborn prophet’s heart! Was worldly ambition lurking there? was his desire to be great, or rich, or noble, or powerful? what an opportunity was now before him; there was no limit, no exception—“Ask what I shall do for thee.” Imagine for a moment, brethren, the question addressed in equal privacy, and

with equal unreserve to yourselves. God has permitted me to fulfil it, what shall I do for you? If all hearts here present were laid open at this moment, and their innermost desire, their most secret aspiration exposed to the eye of man, as it already is to the eye of God, how many would be ashamed to see, what they have never yet been ashamed to feel. How many would at once demonstrate that this world in some shape or other, its profits, pleasures, power, rank, grandeur, nothingness, are, after all, the idols that fill the highest throne, and sit enshrined in the most secret hiding-place of their heart. How many would say, Bestow upon me such a degree of wealth, fulfil to me that long-cherished anticipation, realize this dream of earthly happiness; how few would petition simply for spiritual blessings, how very few would be content to say, Give me but a larger portion of the Spirit of the Lord, of the mind that was in Christ Jesus, of the image of my God, and I am satisfied.

“Elisha answered and said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me. And he said, Thou hast asked a hard thing; nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so.” “Thou hast asked a hard thing;” “Is any thing, then, too hard for the Lord?”* It is God’s own question to Abraham. Assuredly not; Elijah might feel it hard for him to ask, but certainly he could not feel it hard for God to grant. “A hard thing?” If it were hard, it was because, as St. James tells us, “Elias was a man subject to like passions,” and like infirmities, “as we are,” and had not yet learned to trust God perfectly, for he had not yet shaken off this body of sin, and had not yet got rid of this “evil heart of unbelief.” Although his feet were almost upon the threshold of heaven, he still felt and spake but as a stranger there. How widely different was the language of Him, who spake as a Son, “All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.”† Yes, brethren, there are no “hard things” with God; there are no exceptions with the Lord Jesus Christ; when ye are strait-

* Gen. xviii. 14.

† Matt. xxi. 22.

ened in prayer, ye are straitened in yourselves, but not in God. His own direction is, "Covet earnestly the best gifts," even the best which God has to bestow ; you cannot go beyond this, and yet He has said, that He will "do abundantly above all that ye are able to ask or think."

It is scarcely necessary to relate, that Elisha's prayer was heard. "It came to pass, as they still went on and talked," not losing a moment of the few that yet remained to them, "that, behold, a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder ; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven."* Such was the closing scene of that remarkable man ; of all the children of men, with one exception, the only one who has travelled upwards to the skies, and escaped the degrading lot of all mortality. In the peculiar characteristics of his life, he seems to have had no prototype, as he had but one† follower ; mysterious alike in his entrance upon the scene of his labours, and in his departure thence. Not a trace of his family or connexions, is handed down to us ; not a vestige by which we can clearly or accurately ascertain even how long he ministered ; and whence he came, is almost as little known to us as whither he was carried.

While, however, we follow, in imagination, his fiery chariot, and gaze at the bright traces of its ascending wheels, it is impossible to dwell upon the servant, when we are so strongly reminded of the Master, and of that solemn declaration, once delivered by angel voices upon Mount Olivet, to those who mourned the loss of a far greater prophet, and were the witnesses of a far nobler ascension, "Why stand ye gazing up into heaven ? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven."‡ "Blessed is that servant whom his Lord when he cometh shall find watching."

The astonishment and grief so vividly displayed in the exclamation of Elisha, while witnessing the wonderful ascent of his friend, must not be overlooked. "And Elisha saw it, and cried,

* 2 Kings ii. 11.

† See Mat. xvii. 10-12.

‡ Acts i. 11.

My father, my father ! the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof. And he saw him no more ; and he took hold of his own clothes," and, in the extremity of his sorrow, " rent them in two pieces."* "The chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof." Elisha, therefore, knew what, alas ! few Christians ever dream of knowing, that the devout and holy followers of God, are the support and safeguard of their country ; the strongest armaments of Israel were the prevailing prayers of her prophets ; and while Elisha mourned, as a child, that his father was taken from him, he sorrowed as a patriot, that the chariot and horsemen of Israel were gone. Here, brethren, is a truth, pre-eminently worth your learning, that the real strength of our beloved country exists not in her fleets, her armies, her wealth, or even in her free and invaluable institutions, and the high intellectual endowments of her senators, but simply and entirely in the blessing of her God ! and this will rest upon her in proportion as her governors are holy and God-fearing men, and her inhabitants a religiously-instructed and a praying people. These are the "chariots of Israel, and the horsemen thereof."

And now the parting scene was over ; Elisha's earthly guide, and spiritual father, was taken from him ; his house was left unto him desolate ; the last worldly tie was severed, and he was called to go forth a houseless and a solitary man, through evil report and good report, to bear the message of the Almighty to the thousands of Israel. Still might he truly say, as his Divine Master, in after ages, said, " Yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me."†

Then, taking up the mantle which had fallen from the ascending prophet, and once more retracing his steps to the banks of Jordan, he smote the waters with the mantle, and said, Where is the Lord God of Elijah, even He ? (for so it is in the original, but the two last words are not translated,) and immediately the waters parted hither and thither, and he again went over dryshod, and returned to Jericho.

* 2 Kings ii. 12.

† John xvi. 32.

Here for a time we must leave this instructive history, thankful if, by God's grace, we carry away with us but this single lesson :—When Elisha's only earthly friend was taken from him, and he had poured forth the first strong wailings of his natural grief, his heart fled upward from the broken cistern to the Living Spring; his earnest inquiry was, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah, even He?" His friend is gone, but the God in whom that friend trusted, still remains; he asks not for Elijah, but for Elijah's God. It was much that he possessed the prophet's mantle, a double portion of his spirit; but more, infinitely more, that he knew, he felt, that he possessed that prophet's God.

Brethren, in the darkest hours of nature's trials, when those you love the dearest and the best are taken from you, let this be your consolation. In the still deeper darkness of spiritual bereavements, when your joy, and hope, and peace are all forsaking you, still seek your surest refuge here; if you have been enabled, by Divine grace, to say, "This God is our God for ever and ever;"* though frames and feelings change, He in whom you trust shall never alter. The waters of your sea may ebb and flow, and as long as you carry about with you a body of sin and death, they will do so, but your Rock cannot, for it is "the Lord God of Elijah, even He!" "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever."

LECTURE II.

2 KINGS II. 21.

"And he went forth unto the spring of the waters, and cast in the salt there, and said, Thus saith the Lord, I have healed these waters."

AT the close of the last lecture, we left Elisha at Jericho, whither he had gone after the translation of Elijah, and where

* Psalm xlviii. 14.

there was a school of the prophets. While he tarried there, as the inspired historian informs us, the men of the city came unto him, and said, "Behold, I pray thee, the situation of this city is pleasant, as my lord seeth; but the water is naught, and the ground barren. And he said, Bring me a new cruse, and put salt therein. And they brought it to him. And he went forth unto the spring of the waters, and cast in the salt there, and said, Thus saith the Lord, I have healed these waters; there shall not be from thence any more dearth or barren land. So the waters were healed unto this day, according to the saying of Elisha which he spake."* How remarkable, and how contradictory, yet, how prevailing and all-powerful, are the means by which God works, whether in nature or in grace. A little salt, a new cruse, and the bitter waters and the barren land are healed. So has it ever been, so is it now; with the Almighty there is no apparent proportion between the means and the end, the cause and the effect. It pleased Christ, by putting clay into the eyes of the blind man, to restore him to sight again. "It pleased God," says the Apostle, "by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe." Who will venture to assert, that the salt, or the cruse, or the clay, or the preaching, bears any proportion to the healed water, the restored eyesight, the saved soul? It is enough, that thus saith the Lord, "I have healed these waters;" it is enough, that God is the doer of it. He who alone can render any means effectual, is equally able to bring to pass his wonderful designs, either with means, or without means, or by the most contradictory of means, as seemeth him best. Remember this, brethren, in the most trying circumstances of your lives; neglect not the prayerful, and persevering use of every mean which the Almighty has placed within your power; but having done so, esteem it your highest privilege, and greatest comfort, to trust implicitly, and to rest calmly upon a God who is entirely above all means, and wholly independent of them, and who not only can, but

* 2 Kings ii. 19

constantly does, deliver his people, when all created means of safety, or escape, are utterly hopeless.

But, brethren, we have said, that this is as true in the kingdom of grace as of nature ; and does not your own spiritual experience corroborate the assertion ? Have you never lamented your great coldness towards God in prayer, your very inadequate feelings of love and gratitude to the Saviour of sinners, for all the unnumbered mercies of which he has made you the partakers, the general obduracy and hardness of your hearts ? We cannot doubt it ; for what child of God was ever entirely free from these roots of bitterness ? And you have pleaded these deficiencies, anxiously and perseveringly, at a throne of grace, and you have faithfully expected that God would hear your prayers, and send you the promised remedies. He has done so, or is, perhaps, at this moment doing so ; but the means he is using, are those which you neither anticipated, nor desired. You have asked him to teach you to love him more, and, strange reply ! he has taken from you some dear relative or friend. You have pleaded that your heart is hard, and he has sent you some great worldly disappointment. You have earnestly besought him to make you feel the truths, which you already know, and he has cast you upon a bed of sickness, or brought upon you some domestic, or mental, or bodily trial ; and you look at these things with wonder, perhaps almost with discontent ; you see no analogy between your petition and God's replies. Take the incident before you as a key to this. God reserves to himself, the right of conferring his own undeserved blessings by his own means, and in his own manner. You do not now understand these means, but, nevertheless, you shall one day learn their fitness and propriety, by their blessed and eternal effects. In all these cases, unassisted nature feels nothing more than that God is shaking the tree ; but grace discovers that it is only that he may gather in " the fruits of righteousness."

Although, then, we cannot imitate God in the means he uses,

we may learn something by the method in which he employs them. He sends not Elisha to the brooks and streams, but to the river head; "he went forth unto the spring of the waters," and there cast in the salt. If the bitterness and barrenness of our perverse and fallen nature are to be healed, it is at the Spring-head alone, that the remedy can be introduced. It is in vain to rest content with saying, I will correct this temper; I will renounce this habit; I will forsake this sin; even if successful, it would be but as if Elisha had healed the single reach of the river that ran through Jericho, and had left all the waters that had followed, to retain their original bitterness. No, it is in the heart that all our bitterness, and all our barrenness originate; there, and there only, can they be cured. "Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit."*

Rest, then, brethren, in nothing short of the renewed heart, the changed nature, the converted soul; seek the Spirit of God, and his blessed and abiding influences, in the well-spring of all your actions, words, and thoughts, and you will no longer have to complain that yours is a life either of bitterness to yourselves, or of barrenness before God.

Elisha, having paid his visit to the school of the prophets at Jericho, went up thence unto Bethel, where was established another of these valuable seminaries; his object, in all probability, to communicate the translation of Elijah, and his own appointment as his successor. Having fulfilled his intention, the prophet withdrew to Carmel, a mountain in the tribe of Issachar, about fifty-six miles distant, situated close to the sea-shore, abounding, as travellers tell, with vines and olives, and covered with shady groves, and sweet-scented shrubs. This was once the favourite resort of Elijah. Here he had miraculously consumed the burnt-offering, and destroyed the prophets of Baal. Here, also, he had withdrawn, to pray for that rain, which, after three years' drought, in answer to his petitions,

* Matt. xii. 33.

again refreshed the face of the earth.* Thither now did Elisha retire, that, amidst its solitudes, he might recruit his wearied spirit, and fit himself for the trying and difficult intercourse with kings and princes, in which he was so shortly to engage. Like our divine Saviour, Elisha prepared himself for the more public and ostensible portions of his ministry, by absolute solitude, and the most secret intercourse with God. Had Elisha never retired to Mount Carmel, he would, in all probability, have been utterly useless in Samaria.

“A ministry of power,” it has been well said, “must be a ministry of prayer.” While the Providence of God directs the words spoken, it is the breath of prayer which fills its wings, and carries it to the heart of the hearer, “quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword.”†

If I may be allowed to speak practically upon this point, as one who for a series of years occupied a post—God only knows, how unworthily and imperfectly—of most incessant employment, I would humbly and affectionately assure my younger brethren in the ministry, that unless there be a resolute apportionment of a certain time every day for entire seclusion and secret communing with God, and private devotional dwelling upon his Holy Word, not with a view to others, but for the improvement of ourselves, there never can be much of real and spiritual nourishment in our ministry, or much of unction in our ministrations, or much of Christ in our own souls.

And, brethren, is not this great duty of temporary abstraction equally necessary to yourselves? The fault of many professing Christians in our day is, that they live too much in public. We do not mean that they are dissipated, or particularly worldly in their habits and associations, although this is true, alas! of some, but that the work of the heart is postponed to the work of the head and the hands; committees, schools, charitable meetings, occupy the time, and fill the thoughts, while solitude, and especially a devotional solitude, is a thing almost unknown. Half the errors of the present day may probably be traced to

* See James v. 17, 18.

† Heb. iv. 12.

this source ; the facility with which Christians are carried away by every wind of doctrine, the low standard of personal holiness, the small amount of self-denying charity ; for these, and such as these, brethren, there is no remedy but walking, like Enoch, very closely with God.

Elisha having descended from Mount Carmel, returned to Samaria, the capital of Israel, about thirty miles distant. Jehoram, the son of Ahab, was at this time ruler over Israel, and the King of Moab having refused his usual tribute, Jehoram invited Jehoshaphat, the King of Judah, to unite with him "against Moab in battle."

To this Jehoshaphat, a good man, but apparently not a very wise one, consented, and taking with him his deputy,* the King of Edom, the three princes proceeded through the wilderness of Edom, towards Moab. Seven days had they continued to advance upon their expedition, amidst the drought and heat of the desert, when, as we are told, "There was no water for the host, and for the cattle that followed them." "Alas!" said the King of Israel, "that the Lord hath called these three kings together to deliver them into the hand of Moab!"† Now, for the first time, they appear to have bethought themselves of God, but, as is too often the case with sinners, only to lay upon God himself the blame of their own misconduct. "The woman whom THOU gavest,"‡ said Adam ; "the LORD hath called these three kings together to deliver them into the hands of Moab," said Jehoram. "But Jehoshaphat said, Is there not here a prophet of the Lord, that we may inquire of the Lord by him?" Seven days had Elisha been travelling with the host, doubtless at God's command, and seven days had the three kings been entirely ignorant of his presence, and perfectly indifferent whether he were among their followers, or whether he still tarried in Samaria. Now, for the first time, they inquired, if there were not a prophet of the Lord among them.

How seldom is either God, or his prophet thought of, until

* 1 Kings xxii. 47.

† 2 Kings iii. 9.

‡ Genesis iii. 12.

the day of adversity drives us to Him. Well is it for us, that the day which made this world a world of sin, made it also a world of suffering and sorrow; for these are the things which instrumentally, in some shape or other, are continually beating off the soul from branch to branch, and from spray to spray, wherever it attempts to settle, until they compel it to take wing, and to mount upward, and to find its only refuge in the bosom of its God.

And one of the King of Israel's servants answered and said, "Here is Elisha, the son of Shaphat, which poured water on the hands of Elijah. And Jehoshaphat said, The word of the Lord is with him. So the King of Israel, and Jehoshaphat, and the King of Edom, went down to him."* The three kings condescend to wait at the door of the tent of the prophet; even Jehoram, who departed not from the sins of Jereboam, but worshipped the golden calves which he had set up, ventures into the prophet's presence, when led thither by adversity and distress. But Elisha, who was doubtless instructed by God, that there was no real change in the heart or conduct of the King of Israel, and that such an act of voluntary humiliation was merely to subserve some temporary exigency, immediately addressed to him this indignant remonstrance, "What have I to do with thee? get thee to the prophets of thy father, and to the prophets of thy mother."† What a reply was this for the hour of anxiety and distress! Well-deserved, indeed, but still most cutting and most appalling.

And think you, brethren, that there are none who may one day receive as cold and forbidding an answer from the lips of that prophet's Master? Think you there are none who shall say, upon the great and solemn hour which awaits us all, "Lord, Lord, open unto us," and to whom that Lord shall reply, "I never knew ye," "get thee to the prophets of thy father, and the prophets of thy mother," and the prophets of thine own choosing; betake thee to the deities whom ye have

* 2 Kings iii. 11 12.

† 2 Kings iii. 13.

served, the world, the flesh, and the devil ; but come not to me whom ye have never sought, or desired to seek, until the bridegroom has entered in, and the door has been shut.

If God's word be true, there will come such a time, and such an answer, to many who now anticipate it not. "Because I have called, and ye refused ; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded ; but ye have set at naught all my counsel, and would none of my reproof ; I also will laugh at your calamity ; I will mock when your fear cometh."* These are God's own words, "They would none of my counsel ; they despised all my reproof ; therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own ways, and be filled with their own devices."† And what is this, brethren, but, I will send them, in the day of adversity, to the gods they worshipped in the day of prosperity.

Ask yourselves, then, who are the gods, to whom you are paying your adoration now, and tendering your willing service ? Self-interest, pleasure, public opinion ! These are the popular deities of to-day. How much of time, property, conscience, are you sacrificing to them ? How many of your thoughts, words, actions, are regulated by them ? They are all-powerful with you now, but what will they profit you, when your soul stands naked and alone, before the tribunal of the Lord Almighty ?

"And the King of Israel," continues the history, "said unto Elisha, Nay : for the Lord hath called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hand of Moab." But Elisha, perfectly unmoved by what he no doubt knew to be the just sentence of God, replied, "As the Lord of Hosts liveth, before whom I stand, surely, were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat, the King of Judah, I would not look toward thee, nor see thee."‡ Such is the power of one devoted servant of the Almighty ! ten such men as "just Lot," would have saved the cities of the plain ; one holy Jehoshaphat rescued from destruction the hosts of Israel and Judah. Who among ourselves shall say, that we or our families may not have been spared to

* Proverbs i. 24-26.

† Proverbs i. 30, 31.

‡ 2 Kings iii. 14.

be here before God to-day, by the residence among us of one true and sincere worshipper, one converted and holy heart?

It was the presence of the wheat alone which preserved the tares that grew in the same field with it, and occasioned the merciful sentence, "Let both grow together until the harvest."

"Were it not for the presence of Jehoshaphat, I would not look toward thee nor see thee." Happy for us sinners, when endeavouring to approach a throne of grace, that we are permitted, nay enjoined, to venture thither only with the presence of the Beloved, and in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Take him with you in every petition there, and you may find "access with boldness" to our heavenly Father. He who could not "look toward thee, nor see thee," while drawing near to Him in your own righteousness, will see you and delight to see you in Christ Jesus, His merits for your deficiencies, His worthiness for your guilt, His perfect obedience unto death, for all the unnumbered transgressions and short-comings of your lives.

Thus the presence of Jehoshaphat insured the services of the prophet; by the command of God, water was miraculously supplied, and the hosts of Israel and Judah were preserved.

Elisha departed with the armies of Israel into his own land. No sooner had he returned thither, than we find him engaged in a work of mercy, probably much more in accordance with his own feelings, than the scenes in which he had lately been employed.

"Now there cried," says the inspired historian, at the commencement of the fourth chapter, "a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets unto Elisha, saying, 'Thy servant my husband is dead; and thou knowest that thy servant did fear the Lord: and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen.'"^{*} It is not easy to conceive a case of greater affliction; a poor woman, just deprived of him who had been the guide and the joy of her life, and owing to inevitable misfortune, left in a state of absolute insolvency and destitution;

^{*} 2 Kings iv. 1.

widowhood and poverty, coming, as alas ! they too often do, even to a child of God, hand in hand. In the first agonizing hours of her bereavement, her hopes are naturally fixed upon her two sons, as the stay and solace of her declining years ; but the relentless creditor seizes even these, in strict accordance with the law of the land ; “ He is come,” she says, “ to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen.”* Her last earthly hope, therefore, is gone, her last earthly prop has given way, and in this hour of nature’s extremity, she betakes herself to the Lord, and falls at the feet of his servant, and without presuming to prescribe, or even to ask a remedy, simply states her case of utter desolation, and leaves a blank in the hands of her God, to be filled up as His mercy and love shall dictate. “ And Elisha,” apparently for a moment almost perplexed by such an accumulation of aggravated woes, “ said unto her, What shall I do for thee ?” how can I help thee ? “ tell me.” The sufferer is silent ; she knows the extent of her calamity, but she does not know the extent of God’s love ; and she is wisely silent, for in suggesting a remedy, she would probably only have abridged her mercies. The child of God can never be so safe as in his Father’s hands. “ Exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think,”† is the only measure by which even an apostle could describe the bounties of our God. The prophet, not noticing her silence, thus continues, “ What hast thou in the house ? And she said, ‘Thine handmaid hath not any thing in the house,’ so entirely had her creditors stripped her of the little which her husband had left behind him, “ save a pot of oil.” “ Then he said, Go, borrow the vessels abroad of all thy neighbours, even empty vessels ; borrow not a few. And when thou art come in, thou shalt shut the door upon thee and upon thy sons, and shalt pour out into all those vessels, and thou shalt set aside that which is full. So she went from him, and shut the door upon her and upon her sons, who brought the vessels to her, and she poured out. And it came to pass, when the vessels were full, that she said unto her son, Bring

* 2 Kings iv. 1.

† Ephesians iii. 20.

me yet a vessel. And he said unto her, There is not a vessel more. And the oil stayed. Then she came and told the man of God: and he said, Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt, and live thou and thy children of the rest.”* First, pay thy debts; though the creditor be heartless, be not thou unjust; the conduct of others to us, makes no alteration in the nature of our duties to them. Enough would still remain to preserve herself and her children from perishing with want.

Most strikingly illustrative is this affecting little incident of that consolatory declaration of the Psalmist, “I have been young, and now am old, yet saw I never the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging their bread.” Rather would God maintain them by a miracle, than that the widow and children of his servant, should perish with hunger. True, vital godliness hath, as the apostle declares, “the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come,”† and He who hath not withheld from us His Son, His only Son, how shall he not also with him freely give us all things? daily bread with daily grace, and at least a sufficiency in time, as well as an infinite inheritance when time shall be no longer. Let, then, those among you who are not blessed with a large portion of worldly goods, learn to trust more simply and entirely to our heavenly Father, even for the supply of this world’s necessities. He, without whom not a sparrow falleth, never will, and never can desert the work of his own hands, and if you go to Him in a manner of childlike dependence and confidence, asking bread, most assuredly He will neither “give you a stone,” nor send you empty away.

If we may legitimately gather thus much for our support and consolation as regards the things of time, from the narrative before us, surely it ought not to be without its encouragement in reference to the abiding possessions of eternity. How beautiful a picture does it present to us of God’s dealings with the poverty-stricken soul! How plainly can we see in it, the humble approach of such a soul in the depths of its destitution,

and in the consciousness of its own emptiness, to our great and blessed Intercessor. The same confidence in his tender compassion and loving-kindness, which marked the approach of the widow to the prophet ; the same humble determination to leave all to Christ, to plead nothing before him but poverty and emptiness, trusting for the remedy, entirely to His mercy and love, who alone can know the extent of the disorder, and alone can minister the cure. While to the question, "What hast thou?" every faculty of the truly convinced and converted soul, also must acknowledge in reply, "I have not any thing" that I can call my own, but my numberless transgressions, my countless sins, which have degraded myself, and have dishonoured thee. Again, as we follow this poor and helpless widow, and behold cask after cask, and vessel after vessel filled from the never-failing cruse, the oil never ceasing, never even diminishing, so long as one vessel more remained to be supplied, how powerfully we are reminded of Him "out of whose fulness have all we received, and grace for grace." What encouragement for yourselves, brethren ; not one member of the spiritual Church of Christ, and not one grace, one virtue in that member which shall not be filled up, by that adorable Saviour, who "fillet all in all." Betake yourselves, then, to Him this day, with a deep feeling of your own utter emptiness and insufficiency, drawing largely upon Him, for all your need ; carry to Him your imperfect prayers, your miserable duties, your defective services, all utterly empty of themselves, all valuable only as we are "fulfilled with His grace and heavenly benediction."* Recollect for your comfort, that so long as one vessel remained empty, the oil never ceased to flow, and the vessels were exhausted, before that cruse had failed. So shall it be with you ; again and again may you find all that you need, and more than all that you can ever need, in the infinite sufficiency of a Saviour's power, the incalculable merits of a Saviour's blood and righteousness, and the unsearchable riches of a Saviour's love.

* Sacramental Service of the Church of England.

Time has not seen, and time shall never see the hour when that well shall fail you, when that fountain shall run dry, so long as there is one thirsting heart to be satisfied, one empty soul to be filled, one penitent and believing sinner to be saved

LECTURE III.

2 KINGS IV. 26.

“Run now, I pray thee, to meet her; and say unto her, Is it well with thee? Is it well with thy husband? Is it well with the child? And she answered, It is well.”

IN the last discourse, we took occasion to remark upon the advantages of religious seclusion, to qualify us for the more ostensible duties of public usefulness; of the truth of this, the life of our blessed Lord, of Elijah the Tishbite, and of the prophet, whose history we are now considering, afford us many and striking examples. Elisha's time, indeed, appears to have been chiefly divided between the solitudes of Mount Carmel, and the thickly-thronged capital of Israel. Upon his road between the two, and about five miles from Mount Tabor, stood the city of Shunem, in the tribe of Issachar, through which, therefore, he was obliged continually to pass, as he journeyed from his scene of public occupation, to his refuge of retirement and repose.

“And it fell on a day,” says the inspired historian, “that Elisha passed to Shunem, where was a great” or wealthy “woman; and she constrained him to eat bread. And so it was, that, as oft as he passed by, he turned in thither to eat bread. And she said unto her husband, Behold now, I perceive that this is an holy man of God which passeth by us continually. Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall; and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and

a candlestick : and it shall be, when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither.”*

How simple and beautiful a picture of ancient manners ! Often, as it appears, had the prophet in his toilsome journey, partaken of the Shunammite's hospitality, although known only to them as a traveller and a pilgrim ; and as often, had here paid their kindness by his devout and holy conversation, cheering and refreshing their souls, perhaps as palpably by all that he could tell of Israel's God, as they were enabled to recruit his wayworn frame, by the provision they so liberally tendered. Anxious, therefore, to secure the longer tarrying of so holy a guest, the woman proposed to build him a private chamber, that when he pleased to retire from the noise and bustle of so large an establishment, he might still remain beneath their roof.

“ And it fell on a day,” continues the history, “ that Elisha came thither, and he turned into the chamber,” probably after partaking of the hospitality of the house, “ and lay there.” Pleased with so kind and unexpected an attention, “ He said to Gehazi his servant, call this Shunammite. And when he had called her, she stood before him. And he said unto him, Say unto her, Behold, thou hast been careful for us with all this care ; what is to be done for thee ? Wouldest thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host ?” After the miracle, of which Elisha had been the instrument, and by which the lives of the three kings and their armies were preserved, as we saw in the last lecture, it is probable that, for a time at least, the prophet's interest was great at court, and that any request of his, might meet with unusual respect and attention, even from Jehoram. It was therefore no slight favour which he proffered to this wealthy matron, for there are few, whatever be their possessions, who have not some desire, even as regards this world and its advantages, very near their hearts. Not so, however, the Shunammite ; she replies with much dignity, though possibly not without some little feeling of self-

* 2 Kings iv. 8.

complacency, "I dwell among mine own people." Intimating that although she did not despise the prophet's offer, happily she felt no need of it. God had blessed her with abundance, and he had accompanied it with that far rarer gift, a contented heart. As for this world's advantages, to which it is evident, Elisha's offer was limited, she has no request to make, no increase to desire; she dwells among her own people and is satisfied.

Still the grateful prophet cannot depart in comfort, until he has shown that the cup of cold water only, given to a prophet, in the name of a prophet, shall in nowise lose its reward. "And he said to his servant, What then is to be done for her? Gehazi answered, Verily she hath no child, and her husband is old. - And he said, Call her. And when he had called her, she stood in the door. And he said, About this season, according to the time of life, thou shalt embrace a son. And she said, Nay, my lord, thou man of God, do not lie unto thine handmaid. And the woman conceived, and bare a son, at that season, that Elisha had said unto her according to the time of life."

How immeasurably do the gifts of God exceed the anticipations of His people! The holy Shunammite could not believe that so great a blessing was in store for her. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."* Equally true as regards the revelations of His grace here, and of His glory hereafter. The natural man, in all the darkness and blindness of a fallen and corrupt heart, cannot conceive of those good and perfect gifts of which the spiritual man lives, even here, in the daily and hourly enjoyment; the sense of God's pardoning love, of His sanctifying Spirit, of his own abiding and comforting grace; and the wisest spiritual man who ever lived, he who has for years dwelt almost within the threshold of heaven, even he who leaned his head upon his Saviour's breast, and lived so near His heart, was probably as

* 1 Cor. ii. 9.

much astonished at the unspeakable gifts of which the first hour in heaven made him the possessor, as the most unconscious infant that ever dropt from its mother's bosom into an eternity of peace and joy.

Sweet must have been the reflections of the prophet, as he journeyed onward upon his solitary way, that he was thus permitted to add all that was wanting to that wealthy establishment, to complete the happiness of its owners. He knew something experimentally, as we have seen, of the comfort of family affection, and of the ties of filial love. And separated as he now was, by the peculiar obligations of the life to which he had been so remarkably called, from the endearments of domestic enjoyment, he was not ignorant, that if there be one temporal gift more blessed than another, affectionate and holy children constitute that boon. For surely it is not too much to say, that while they enable us to live over again our own lives by witnessing the happiness of theirs, they bring before our eyes, even amidst all the sins and infirmities of their fallen nature, much of the innocence and joy, the unhesitating trust and unsuspecting love, which will constitute the happiness of heaven.

Brethren, while such precious gifts are granted you, remember that they are yours, for higher and for holier purposes than to delight your eyes, and gladden and rejoice your hearts; that they are yours, to educate for the presence and society of your God. Sad indeed will be that parent's heart, at the great day of account, who shall stand before the tribunal of the Lord, bereft of some once tenderly dear to him, and shall feel, I never laboured, I never prayed, I never strove earnestly and perseveringly to bring my children to the knowledge of the Lord Almighty. The world was once the model for my own conduct, and for my children's imitation, I knew no higher, and sought no wiser guide for them; and although God in his mercy taught me better things, and snatched me as a brand from the burning, it was all too late for those who had lived a life of utter worldliness beneath my roof, and died in unrepented sin before my eyes.

Often, doubtless, as Elisha from time to time, partook of the hospitality of these Shunammites, did he, from his prophet's chamber on the wall, look down with satisfaction upon that growing child, and thank God, that he had been permitted to make the happy parents the possessors of so dear a gift; and probably, not seldom did he call him aside from the incumbrances of wealth, by which he was so early and so thickly surrounded, and impart to his young mind the first germs of that immortal knowledge of Israel's ever-present God, and of its coming Saviour, and of the more enduring riches treasured up for those who love Him, in a far fairer land than even the happy Canaan in which they dwelt.

But, alas! the best of God's earthly gifts, are ours only for the shortest periods. The dearest and the sweetest children, are but as flowers from our heavenly Father's garden, which often come but as a summer's loan, and then away again. Happy they, who can hold them with so loose a hand, and with so wise a heart, as to restore them thankfully and cheerfully, when called for, by Him from whom they came.

"And when the child was grown," continues the narrative, "it fell on a day that he went out to his father to the reapers. And he said unto his father, My head, my head."

Observe the instinct of this helpless little one; the first feeling of pain sends him to his father. Brethren, we would inquire, whither does the first trace of anxiety, or sorrow, or disappointment, send yourselves? To the world, to society, to pleasure, or to God? Observe carefully your spiritual instinct, and learn from it your spiritual relationship. If God be indeed your Father, you will as naturally run to him in the first hours of nature's suffering, as he, of whom we are speaking, to his earthly parent. Not a pain, not a sorrow, not an anxiety, which can befall you, but will be poured forth, in all the confidence, and all the humility, and all the love of helpless infancy, into the ears of him, whom the Spirit hath taught you to call "Abba, Father," and from whom, as reconciled to you in Christ Jesus, you will expect to find, and assuredly will

find, all, and more than all a parent's sympathy, and a parent's love.

And the father "said to a lad, Carry him to his mother. And when he had taken him and brought him to his mother, he sat on her knees, till noon, and then died."*

Great, and unexpected, had been that mother's joy, and fearfully sudden and unlooked for, was her present visitation. An hour before, she had parted from her treasured boy in all the fulness of health and vigour, had delighted to see his little footsteps following her husband to the field, to gain the useful lessons of practical knowledge from the father, in addition to the still higher instructions, which are imparted best upon a mother's knee. And now he is brought back to her, a drooping and a dying child, he has been struck by the rays of the too fervid sun, and lingers an hour or two in helpless and hopeless agony upon her lap, and his freed spirit returns to God who gave it.

This is the moment, brethren, to learn rightly to estimate her of whom we are speaking; great successes and great reverses bring with them powerful developments of human character. We had no doubt from the first that the Shunammite was a holy woman, or she would scarcely have coveted so earnestly the society of the man of God. We had no reason to question that she was a sensible and reflecting woman, or she never would have discovered so clearly the perils of court favour and worldly aggrandizement. But she must be placed in the furnace of affliction, before the most striking features of her faith can be brought out, or the highest and most beautiful points in her unusually lofty character, can be revealed to us.

"And she went up," to adopt the simple language of Scripture, "and laid her child on the bed of the man of God, and shut the door upon him, and went out."† But why so carefully close that door, or why is so minute a circumstance recorded? Doubtless to mark the strength of her faith, and

* 2 Kings iv. 19, 20.

† 2 Kings iv. 21.

the reality of her dependence upon God. She fastens the door, lest during her projected absence of some hours, in a climate where the bodies are usually interred before sunset, her husband should commit the child to the silent grave, while she was preparing only for his resurrection. "And she called her husband, and said, Send me, I pray thee, one of the young men, and one of the asses, that I may run to the man of God, and come again." "And he said," probably having yet no idea of the fatal termination of his child's illness, "Wherefore wilt thou go to him to-day? It is neither new moon nor Sabbath." She dares not disclose her intention, fearful, lest her husband's faith should not be sufficiently strong to aid her, in what might appear to him, so wild and profitless an enterprise. She simply replies "It shall be well." "Then she saddled an ass, and said to her servant, Drive and go forward; slack not thy riding for me, except I bid thee. So she went, and came unto the man of God to Mount Carmel."

And now the scene changes, and we behold the prophet on his watch-tower, where, in close communion with his God, his happiest hours held on the even tenor of their way, not gladdened indeed by the cheering rays of social intercourse, but then not embittered by the thousand crosses of domestic life; gathering strength for days of greater usefulness, and enjoying such near and friendly access to the Most High, that he seems almost surprised, that any thing should be concealed from him, in which his heavenly Father's hand is traceable.

An unusual sight breaks in upon these spiritual communings; he beholds "afar off" the afflicted Shunammite, driving in haste through the unfrequented forest, and evidently making for his solitary abode.

With that quick feeling, which marks the man who is touched the most readily, and most deeply, with another's wo, he waits not until she arrives; he is anxious to anticipate her wishes, and remembering at once those objects that must be nearest and dearest to her heart, calls his servant, and exclaims, "Be-

hold, yonder is that Shunammite: run now, I pray thee, to meet her, and say unto her, Is it well with thee? Is it well with thy husband? Is it well with the child?"

How closely does the conduct of the prophet resemble, in its anxious solicitude, that of his Divine Master, and yet, like every other human imitation, how infinitely does it fall below it. "When he was yet a great way off," says our Lord, describing, in his well-known parable, the Almighty's anxiety for the salvation of the returning sinner, "his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him." We love the prophet, for not coldly awaiting the arrival of the sorrowing Shunammite; we think much of his condescension and kindness, in sending thus quickly to anticipate her coming, and yet how little, comparatively, do we think of the infinitely greater love of Him, who goes in person to meet every returning prodigal, and to seek as well as to save every repentant soul! Cold indeed must be that human heart, unquestionably perverted those feelings, which can hear of all our heavenly Father's daily, hourly displays of preventing grace, as manifested towards each of us individually, and not to be filled to overflowing with gratitude and love. "A great way off," aye, who shall say how far, were the happiest of the glorified spirits who now surround the throne, when first their Father saw, and loved, and pitied them, and with the outgoings of His grace, met, and led, and brought them to himself.

In the instructions that the prophet gave his servant, not one object is omitted which he thinks the thoughts, or hopes of his coming visiter, are fixed upon, or from which, he imagines it possible that her present sorrow emanates. But the afflicted mother came not thus fast, and far, to speak with the servant. She answers Gehazi at once, when he repeats the inquiry, "Is it well? It is well."

It has generally been thought that this reply was intended to express a high degree of resignation and holy calmness; and excellent use, for the consolation of the mourner,* has been

* Hill's useful little work, "It is Well."

made of this interpretation ; but the impression which it is rather calculated to leave, after a careful perusal of the whole history, is, that it was the passing answer of a subdued, and yet dignified spirit, not choosing to open up the springs of its grief to any, save the prophet himself. Very characteristic of one who could reply to that prophet, "I dwell among mine own people ;" and who could lay her dead child upon the bed, and lock the door upon him, and go at once, without receiving advice, and without seeking it, to God's own minister, in the fulness of Abraham's faith, believing that God would certainly restore, what he had so mercifully and unsought-for given.

However this may be, it is evident that the Shunammite communicated nothing to Gehazi, and slackened not her driving until she reached the hill where Elisha, having descended from his tower, was anxiously waiting her arrival. Her first action was, to throw herself at his feet, in all the eloquence of silent woe. "But Gehazi came near to thrust her away." His feelings alive, perhaps, to the little slight just cast upon himself, by her brief and hurried answer, but partaking not of his master's sympathy and love. "And the man of God said, Let her alone, for her soul is vexed within her ; and the Lord hath hid it from me, and hath not told me." How kind and merciful is the treatment of the prophet. How beautiful a model for us, the ministers of Christ, when dealing with the afflicted, the desolate, the convicted, the inquiring spirit. "Her soul is vexed within her," is fully sufficient to apologize for all that might be unusual or indecorous, in the manner of her address. If we would bind up the broken heart, or heal the trembling and sin-repentant soul, let us never forget that it is to be done with the gentle hand of Him, who could touch the bruised reed without breaking it, and who, with the same look which sent the penitent Peter to tears of bitterness, assured him of his pardoning and abiding love. Then the Shunammite for the first time gave utterance to her grief. "Did I desire a son of my Lord ! Did I not say, do not deceive me ?" How singular, yet how touching an address ! Here is nothing of the

wailing and lamentation of the childless mother. She simply reminds the prophet, that the loss for which she mourns was his own gift, unsolicited, unexpected ; but surely, not intended to be vouchsafed, merely until she had learned to love and value it, and then to be as suddenly withdrawn. Still, if it were so, "It is well ;" but he who was the bearer of the Almighty's gift, shall not remain in ignorance that it has been resumed. Elisha replies not a word to this remarkable appeal, but turning to Gehazi, said, "Gird up thy loins, and take my staff in thine hand, and go thy way ; if thou meet any man, salute him not ; and if any salute thee, answer him not again ; and lay my staff upon the face of the child."

It was mercifully and promptly done, and, doubtless, had the Shunammite sent to the prophet, no human messenger whom she could have selected would have expected more ; none who would not have returned with that commissioned servant, satisfied and rejoicing. But when God made the Shunammite a mother, he gave her, as he usually does, a mother's heart ; and the inspired historian, in recording her behaviour, perhaps intentionally, reminds us of this important clue to her otherwise too pertinacious conduct. He continues, "The mother of the child said, as she saw Gehazi hastening away with the prophet's staff, to perform the miracle, As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." Elisha, no doubt, duly appreciating a character so like his own—for you will remember that these were the identical words which he himself had made use of, when urged by Elijah to remain behind—immediately followed his servant, and accompanied the mother. Perhaps, also, he had some slight misgivings, whether this were a commission which ought to have been entrusted to another, and whether it would not require more than a prophet's staff, or even a double portion of a prophet's spirit, to perform a miracle, by the mere presence of his servant, which, in Elijah's case, had required the earnest prayers and entreaties, and the personal exertions of the prophet. "And Gehazi passed on before them, and laid the staff on the face of the child ; but

there was neither voice nor hearing : wherefore he went again to meet him, and told him, saying, 'The child is not awakened.' Still the watchful mother is silent. She may have had doubts of the servant's power, but she has none of the master's, or of that master's God. "So they passed on to Shunem together." "And when Elisha was come into the house, behold the child was dead, and laid upon his bed. He went in therefore, and shut the door upon them twain, and prayed unto the Lord."

And now the mother's faith obtains a rich reward ; "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much," even to the recalling of the departed spirit, and the restoring the dead child to life again.

"And Elisha called Gehazi and said, Call this Shunammite. So he called her. And when she was come in unto him, he said, 'Take up thy son. Then she went in, and fell at his feet, and bowed herself to the ground, and took up her son, and went out.'"

Such is the conclusion of this miracle of mercy ; the happy mother receives again to her bosom her living child ; her heart is too full for utterance to man ; she testifies, in silence, her gratitude to the prophet, and then retires to pour forth her praises and thanksgivings to God, that this her son, "was dead, and is alive again ; was lost, and is found."

And here, brethren, we might conclude our observations, but there was an inquiry, which we would not interrupt the course of the narrative to dwell upon, though we cannot silently pass it by.

I would repeat it, then, addressing it to every individual among you, not in the spirit of impertinent intrusion or curiosity, but of deep, and earnest, and affectionate solicitude for the best interests of your immortal souls. "Is it well with thee?"

How much is involved in that little question ; how much hangs upon the answer. Would that we might say to each of you, as St. John says to "the well-beloved Gaius," "Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper, and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth." But alas ! we should be

afraid, in the smallest congregation, to make such an assumption, to take so vital a truth for granted. We, therefore, urge you to ask yourselves, "Is it well with me?"

To assist you in the inquiry, consider that you are all of you the baptized and avowed followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, pledged by your own voluntary declaration, to renounce the devil and all his works, the world, and all its lying vanities, the flesh, and all its polluting lusts. Now, are you fulfilling, or endeavouring, by God's help, to fulfil these baptismal obligations? Are you living to the world, or to God? Are you indulging, it matters not how secretly, in any known and habitual sin? Be that sin concealed in the deepest recesses of your heart, from the most searching eye of your fellow-men, it is perfectly known to God; and if you are, at this moment, conscious of any one such cherished and forbidden feeling, so long as it remains unforsaken, and unrepented of, be assured that "it is not well with thee." The world may smile upon you, friends may flatter you, your own heart may deceive you, but the living God has said, by the mouth of his prophet Isaiah, "Woe unto the wicked; it shall be ill with him,"* and what God has said, God will one day verify before assembled worlds.

But once more, we would repeat the question, addressing ourselves to you who have reason to believe that you have been so renewed in the spirit of your mind, by the power of the Holy Ghost, that you are enabled to say, with an Apostle, "The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." Do you feel an increasing love for God, as revealed to you in the person and character of the Lord Jesus Christ? an increasing hatred of all sin, and desire to avoid even the least deviation from the will of God, as far as you are enabled to understand and receive it? Do you endeavour to cultivate an unworldly, self-denying, devotional spirit, fulfilling all your duties, whatever be your rank and station in society, as unto God, and not merely unto man, seeking daily more and more of that close

* Isaiah iii. 11.

union with the Saviour, as living branches in the true vine, without whom you can do nothing?

Then have we the authority of the living God, in answering also for you the inquiry of the text, for has He not said, by the mouth of the same prophet,* “Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him.”

Yes, beloved brethren, it is well with you. Though at this moment you feel and acknowledge that you are but unprofitable servants, though you dare hardly take the consolation to yourselves, though your own infirmities and transgressions are much more present to your thoughts than any symptoms of spiritual life and holiness, it is well with you now, and your God has said, “It shall be well with you;” a promise from which no time of future trial, no moment of distant anxiety, is meant to be excluded. It shall be well with you in every season of approaching sorrow, or adversity or distress; it shall be well with you at the hour of death; it shall be well with you in the day of judgment, and in the eternity that shall follow. “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my word shall not pass away;” and that eternal Word has said, “Say ye to the righteous, It shall be well with him,” even for ever and ever.

LECTURE IV.

2 KINGS v. 10.

“And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean.”

AFTER the deeply-interesting narrative which engaged our attention upon the last occasion of my addressing you, we find Elisha passing on from Shunem to Gilgal, paying another visit to the school of the prophets there, and again performing a miracle of kindness and mercy.

* Isaiah iii. 10.

He then retired to his watch-tower upon Mount Carmel, returning, necessarily through Shunem, and no doubt occupying once more his prophet's chamber on the wall, and gladdening his heart yet again with the sight of the happy mother, and her restored and healthful child. While immersed in his beloved solitude, the providence of God was preparing for him a second visitor, differing, indeed, most widely from her of whom we have lately spoken, but about to become equally a monument of the effect of the prayers of the prophet, and of the power of God.

Before we enter upon the consideration of the important interview to which we refer, we must take a brief survey of the circumstances that led to the arrival of this new visitor, a native of a foreign country, a man of warlike pursuits, and of idolatrous practices; high in rank, haughty in demeanour, and altogether, perhaps, one of the last whom we should have expected to find an humble suppliant at the prophet's gate.

"Naaman," for it is he of whom we speak, "was," we are told, "captain of the host of the king of Syria, a great man with his master, and honourable, because by him the Lord had given deliverance (or victory) unto Syria." It was he, so the Targum informs us, who is spoken of in Scripture as "a certain man who drew a bow at a venture," which killed Ahab, and this, no doubt, had added greatly to his renown: he was "also a mighty man in valour—but he was a leper." What a close is this to the catalogue of his endowments. He possessed every thing that could make this world enjoyable, "but" he possessed one thing which marred the happiness of them all. Probably the whole of Syria envied the greatness, and the prosperity, and the exploits of Naaman, and yet, in that vast empire, not the lowest slave would have been found willing to have inherited his honours, if his leprosy had been a part of the entail. So remarkably equal, in every age, have been the dispensations of Providence. If we knew the whole of each man's lot, perhaps of all those whom we are now most inclined to envy, there is not one human being in the universe with

whom we should be willing to exchange conditions. How powerful an incitement to follow the apostolical example, "I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." You will observe, that even St. Paul had learned this lesson ; he knew it not by nature, and most assuredly it was never taught him at the feet of Gamaliel. It is only at the feet of Christ that true contentment is ever learnt. The man of the world may be taught, by long experience, theoretically to confess its excellence ; but the man of God alone is enabled practically to realize its truth. He feels that, although in his lot, as in Naaman's, there must ever in this world be some exception, some "*but* ;" still that he has every thing who possesses Christ, for the Word of God has said, "All things are yours, whether the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come ; all are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's." He no longer, therefore, views his worldly disappointments, or his mental trials, or his bodily ailments, as un-mixed calamities ; so far from it, that, tracing a Father's hand, and a Father's love, in every visitation, every exception to his lot, he is enabled to feel gratitude even for those very chastenings in which the world can see nothing but unmitigated misery. In advancing years, and in declining health, the most trying of all visitations to the mere man of the world, the Christian is able to look contentedly, and even cheerfully, at the shaking of the walls of that cottage of clay in which his better part is sojourning ; and to smile at the thought, that yet a few more years, or months, and they shall mingle with their kindred dust, and their freed inhabitant shall wing its way to brighter regions, and a more enduring home. While he can say with one of the holiest men of our own Church, of the last generation, "Thank God for decay, pain, and suffering ; thank God that I was born to die ; thank God that I can die ; thank God that the time is near ; thank God for the prospect and hope of a better world ; and thank God for strong consolation through Christ."*

* Adam of Wintringham.

“And the Syrians,” continues the narrative, “had gone out by companies, and had brought away captive, out of the land of Israel, a little maid, and she waited on Naaman’s wife. And she said unto her mistress, Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria ! for he would recover him of his leprosy. And one went in and told his lord, saying, Thus and thus said the maid that is of the land of Israel. And the king of Syria said, Go to, go, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel. And he departed, and took with him ten talents of silver, and six thousand pieces of gold, and ten changes of raiment.” How admirably prompt is Naaman in availing himself of the intelligence. Not a moment appears to be lost in fruitless procrastinations ; he no sooner hears that there is a prophet in Israel who can heal him, than he enters at once upon the journey, to go in person and seek him. And this excites no surprise in the mind of any individual who reads it ; that a man suffering under an incurable and painful disorder, should fly to the remedy, the moment one is proposed, is too natural even to call for an observation.

Alas ! how different is it in spiritual things ! Every day, every hour, every moment, souls are passing into eternity ; and of these, who shall calculate the number that have never intended to reject the offers of salvation, and yet have died unpardoned and unsaved, simply because they have postponed repentance until too late to practise it, or delayed to listen to the things belonging to their peace, until they were hid from their eyes.

“And Naaman brought the letter to the king of Israel, saying, Now, when this letter is come unto thee, behold, I have therewith sent Naaman my servant to thee, that thou mayest recover him of his leprosy. And it came to pass, when the king of Israel had read the letter, that he rent his clothes, and said, Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy ? Wherefore consider, I pray you, and see how he seeketh a quarrel against me.”

“And it was so,” continues the historian, “when Elisha, the man of God, had heard that the king of Israel had rent his clothes, that he sent to the king, saying, Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? let him now come to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel. So Naaman came with his horses and with his chariot, and stood at the door of the house of Elisha.”

Very interesting is it to remark the difference of the prophet's conduct, under almost precisely similar circumstances, in the last and present incident. On the last occasion, as you will doubtless recollect, no sooner did Elisha from his tower behold through the long vistas of the forest the Shunammite with her single attendant, hastening onward to his solitary abode, than he quickly despatched his servant to ascertain the cause of her visit, and as speedily descended himself to greet her, in person, upon her arrival. In the present instance, he beheld, perfectly unmoved, the long and splendid retinue of the leader of the armies of Syria as they wound up the hill on which his watch-tower stood, and patiently waited until they had reached his gate, and were looking anxiously for admittance.

Even then his conduct is not altered; he neither invites the great man into his house, nor descends in person to welcome him. Whence is it that the prophet, kind, and affable, and humble to all the world, appears harsh and reserved to Naaman? Elisha's object evidently was this; he was about to instruct the haughty Syrian in the school of Christ, and the first lesson in that school, is humility. “Except ye be converted, and become as little children,” as teachable, as confiding, as humble, said our blessed Lord, “ye shall in nowise enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

“And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean. But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, he will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper.

Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? May I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage." What a striking instance of a man retaining his proud heart, and his lofty carriage, under one of the most humbling of the providences of God! Naaman, the subject of the most loathsome disease of which the Bible tells, is just as proud, as haughty, as unhumbed, as the same Naaman in perfect health, exulting in his personal endowments at the head of the armies of Syria. The lesson this teaches, is a very useful one; a sick bed, a dark and trying visitation, even a mortal malady, does not necessarily soften or subdue the heart. You will be disappointed if you expect it; you may pass through God's hottest furnace, and come out of its fires as thousands do, like the potter's vessel, harder than you entered them.

If you really desire humbleness of heart, and who that hopes for heaven ought not? you must not wait to seek it in a chamber of sickness, for it is seldom found there. Strive for it in health, pray for the abiding influences of God's good Spirit now, who can, without any of these means, do for you that which the heaviest chastenings of God's hand, without the operation of His Spirit, never will effect.

But there is yet another lesson to be learned from this proud Syrian. "Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper." No doubt he did. Filled with the idea of his own importance, he expected that the prophet should descend from his tower, and stand humbly beside the patient's chariot, and wave his hand on high, and call upon the name of his God, and cure him, with "all the pomp and circumstance" of miracle, and if so, he will accept the boon; but if it is to be done without any consideration for his preconceived opinions, or any of this dramatic effect, by secret prayer and simple washing, he will wrathfully and scornfully reject it. Brethren, how many among you who can see the folly, the madness, of this act of the leper, have

imitated, nay, are at this moment imitating it yourselves? You stand convicted of as deeply rooted, as fatal, as incurable, a malady as that of Naaman. For have you not acknowledged, since you have been in this house to-day, that you are "miserable sinners?" Have you not voluntarily confessed, "We have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done, and there is no health in us?" All the wisdom of man, and all the devices of man, so the Word of God assures us, are utterly unable to take away sin, to effect your cure. You come to the ministers of God, and you are referred by them to the only fountain ever opened upon earth, for sin and for uncleanness; you are told, for God himself has told you, "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin." "Wash and be clean;" "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." And how many are there among you who have simply and cordially availed themselves of this proffered remedy? And how many who, from the very simplicity of its nature, have turned scornfully or thoughtlessly away? What, bathe in Jordan, said Naaman, when "the golden streams" (for so they were called,) run through Damascus? What, go in simplicity to the blood of Christ for all my salvation hereafter, and all my peace and pardon here, and with my own heartfelt exertions and golden duties, my prayers, my uprightness, my charities, be content to take my stand among my fellow-sinners, and be treated as the veriest outcast of them all? It is too much for human nature. Yes, brethren, it is too much for nature, but it is not too much for grace. God can enable you to receive even this, deeply mortifying as it confessedly is, that if you would be clean, you must not mingle any thing of your own, whether they be labours of love or works of self-denial, or tears of penitence, as causes of your justification before Him, with that pure and perfect stream which flowed on Calvary. You must come, the holiest and the best among you, with the most polluted, and the most abandoned, to the same crucified Redeemer. That, in the language of our Com-

union Service, you may evermore dwell in Christ and Christ in you. You dwelling in Christ, by faith, for your justification, and Christ dwelling in you, by his Spirit, for your sanctification. Beware then, I earnestly entreat you, of the thousand errors upon this high subject, with which the devil has in all ages, deluded men to their ruin; especially be upon your guard against those more refined and subtle, but not less destructive errors, which our own days, in opposition alike to the concurrent voice of the best ages of the Church, to the blessed light of the Reformation, and to our Articles, and Homilies, have so remarkably revived. Beware of looking to any thing in yourselves, even to any "infused inherent sanctification" to effect your justification, which must ever be the antecedent of the former; for until there is justification, there can be no sanctification. Beware, in fact, of trusting to any thing out of Christ, for this great and blessed, this free and soul-saving gift. In the simplicity of the Gospel is our safety; wo to the souls of those who would exalt the Abana and Pharpar, the earthly waters of human holiness, however derived, above, or on a level with the heavenly stream of a Saviour's blood!

"And his servants came near, and spake unto him, and said, My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?"

How wise an expostulation! how well were these servants aware of this infirmity of our common nature. "If the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it?" Who can question it? And what Naaman would have done cheerfully for the health of his body, the great majority of mankind would as willingly do, the followers of every false religion under heaven, are at this moment doing, for the health of their souls. From the pillar monks of antiquity, who, to obtain the favour of God, stood for days, and nights, and years, upon their columns, exposed to every change of temperature and season, down to the ascetic of the present hour, who hopes, at least in part, to win his way to heaven by the self-inflicted

miseries and privations of earth ; men have in all ages preferred “ the great things ” of their own invention, to the simple remedy of God’s revealing. The more appalling the difficulty, the more flattering to our proud spirits is its achievement. The more devious the path, the greater the ingenuity to walk straightly in it ; while there is little to gratify the pride of human wisdom, in finding our road to heaven by that “ king’s highway,” as the prophet Isaiah calls it, of which he says, “ The wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein.” Yet, brethren, if you would enter heaven, through this highway alone can you travel thither ; if you would be healed, in this fountain alone can you be cleansed. Happily for Naaman, the expostulations of his servants were not lost upon him, for we read, “ Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the man of God : and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.”

While this remarkable miracle affords us another instance of God’s power, how instructive an evidence is it also of the mysterious operations of His providence. Our Lord himself pointedly refers to it, as one of the most astonishing proofs of the Almighty’s sovereignty, to be met with in the writings of the Old Testament, when he says, “ Many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet ; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian.”* The lepers of Israel were passed unnoticed by, while this Syrian chieftain, who had often led his armies against God’s chosen people, was selected amidst his pride and his obduracy and his idolatry, to be the subject of a miracle of mercy ! “ Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight,” was the reflection of our Lord himself upon a still more astonishing proof of the mysterious working of God’s providence, than even the incident before us.

Brethren, it is well to learn early in the spiritual life this great truth ; that there are many points in our earthly pilgrimage, where Reason must be content to follow Faith blindfold ; that there are depths in religion where the strongest Reason will

* Luke iv. 27.

infallibly be drowned, unless supported in the arms of Faith ; that the dearest child in God's redeemed family must often be satisfied when he feels his Father's hand, whether in providence or grace, to be unable to trace his Father's footsteps. Even David was compelled to say, "Thy way is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known."* Yet at the very time he said so, he devoutly and beautifully adds, "Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary."† Though it be a way of darkness, it is still a way of holiness and truth. So again does the same Psalmist declare of Israel of old, "They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way ; they found no city to dwell in." For forty years was this trial continued to them, yet he adds, "God led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation."‡ Though the footsteps of the Lord be hidden, they are still within the sanctuary ; though the way be long and wearisome, it is still the right way. Such we scruple not to say, in every individual instance, shall we find it ; and when we shall look down upon the road, as seen from the habitations of the heavenly city, and trace it from the far distant country from which we came, and observe all its trackless windings, and its now unintelligible turnings, we shall clearly perceive that none other could have carried us to the many mansions of our Father's house.

Finally, we would apply spiritually and to ourselves, the completion of this miracle, as we have already done the steps which led to it.

We may learn from it most distinctly, that "God is no respecter of persons ;" but that His mercy and His love, whether in providence or in grace, are open to all who seek them. No difficulties of rank, no station or employment, no deeply-rooted habits of iniquity, no depth of guilt, need necessarily keep us from their unlimited offers, from their unbounded treasures. There is nothing throughout the whole of God's revealed Word, from Genesis to Revelation, to lead us to question this ; no trace of a decree which should prevent one poor

* Psalm lxxvii. 19.

† Ibid. 13.

‡ Ibid. cvii. 4, 7.

suffering sinner who desires it, from flying to the living fountain of which we have this day spoken; "Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely," are the words of Him who spake as never man before or since has spoken. Only resolve, by God's grace, with the Syrian to be immediate in your application, not to hesitate, not to procrastinate, not to wait till you are healed before you come to the physician, but to come unhesitatingly and at once, and Naaman's cure was not more certain than your own.

Would that God might, at this moment, see some heart here present, which has long been halting between two opinions, long wavering upon the line between God and the world, long listening to, but never yet absolutely receiving the offers of salvation, now by His grace close with them for ever. That he might hear the prayer which man cannot hear, Lord, create my heart anew, enable me from this hour to renounce every sin which has hitherto stood between thee and me, to give up every idol, however near and dear to me, which has hitherto excluded Thee from my affections, to fulfil every duty which Thou hast commanded, and which I have hitherto evaded or neglected, but above all, and before all, to cast myself as a miserable sinner at the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ, seeking there, and there alone, pardon and peace.

Is there one soul that sympathizes with me while I thus speak? One who has entered this house to-day, it may even be indifferent, thoughtless, sinful, hoping to be amused and interested, but caring little to be profited, and yet who is now, by God's grace, and the powerful influence of his Spirit, beginning to mourn for sin, to grieve for having offended God, to desire at all cost, and at every sacrifice, to be saved by Christ, and by Christ alone. If there be, then blessed be God, for this fresh instance of his sovereign love. "No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him." Praised be God for that one sinner that repenteth. We say to you, "Go in peace." Determine, by God's help, to live only according to the convictions and feelings which are now

commencing, and in the service of Him who has thus sought and found you, and eternity itself shall not reverse the decision of this day. Time shall have run its weary round, and be no longer ; ages as incalculable as the drops of spring, shall have rolled by, for ever, and there amidst joys unnumbered and untold, at God's right hand, shall you remember the event of this day and hour within these walls ; that here, by God's unbounded grace, was first sown within your heart the imperishable seed, the germ of a happy immortality ; that here, you were made "one with Christ and Christ with you ;" even with Him, who is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever," and who has said, of the least and lowest of his people, "They shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand."

LECTURE V.

2 KINGS v. 26. (part.)

"And he said unto him, Went not mine heart with thee, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee ?"

AT the commencement of the present lecture, we find Naaman, the Syrian, once more retracing his steps from the banks of Jordan, to the hill of Carmel—no inconsiderable journey, to testify his gratitude to Elisha for the miracle of mercy, which formed the subject of our last discourse. "To him that hath," says the word of inspiration, "shall more be given." One blessing rightly improved, one mercy thankfully and gratefully acknowledged, often leads the way to far greater and far higher evidences of the loving-kindness and compassion of our God. Of this, Naaman was about to furnish a striking and profitable example. He had come into the land of Israel, only to be healed of his leprosy, and God sent him back to Syria, healed of his corruption, cleansed of an evil heart of unbelief, united in an everlasting covenant with the great Jehovah.

Continuing the history before us at the 15th verse, we read, "And Naaman returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and came and stood before him." The lesson of humility, therefore, to which we alluded in the last lecture, had now been learnt. The great man did not again expect the prophet to come down, and stand beside his chariot, while he sat to receive his miraculous benediction. He is willing, with the meek and lowly spirit of a little child, to humble himself, and while he acknowledges his temporal mercies, to confess also his spiritual change, his conversion to the God of Israel. "Behold, now," is the language of the lately idolatrous Syrian, "I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel: now therefore I pray thee, take a blessing," receive a present, "from thy servant." But Elisha said, "As the Lord liveth, before whom I stand, I will receive none. And he urged him to take it; but he refused. And Naaman said, Shall there not then, I pray thee, be given to thy servant two mules' burthen of earth? for thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt-offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the Lord." In this, we trace, probably, some remains of his ancient superstition, although there was clearly none of his idolatry, for he distinctly promises to worship no other god but the God of Israel. Probably he thought, that as God had commanded that altars should be built of earth,* none was so proper for the purpose as that of the Holy Land itself. However this may be, if it were a superstition, it was clearly an innocent one; for the prophet leaves him in the possession of it, unreprieved: and Naaman thus continues: "In this thing the Lord pardon thy servant, that when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon; the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing. And he said unto him, Go in peace."

There are few points upon which commentators have evidently been more perplexed, than in reconciling this apparent reservation of Naaman in favour of at least a questionable

* Exodus xx. 24.

observance, with the silence or permission of Elisha. Some, indeed, have entirely overcome the difficulty, by supposing that Naaman is speaking of what is past, and that he asked pardon only for what he had already done, and not for what he still intended to do, translating the passage thus, "When my master has gone into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and has leaned on my hand, and I have bowed myself in the house of Rimmon, the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing." If the original would bear this construction, there is no doubt nothing could be more satisfactory; but the best Hebrew scholars question this, and all ancient versions and translations oppose it. In the face, therefore, of such testimony, we cannot adopt it, but must consider the sentence as presented to us in our translation.

If, however, you will only consider how much the new convert had already promised, and how little the prophet favoured his reservation of what still remained, we hardly think that any very dangerous lesson can be deduced, even from the most literal interpretation of the passage before us. Naaman had distinctly declared, that he now acknowledged no other god in all the earth, but the God of Israel; he had said more, he had promised that henceforth he would never offer another sacrifice to any but the great Jehovah; the reservation which he makes, is simply this; that when the king, his master, takes him into the house of his idol, as a matter of state, leaning on his arm, if he bows himself when his master does so, not in religious worship, for this he absolutely disavows; not in hypocritical dissimulation, for that would be irreconcilable with the character of a man who could thus openly mention it to the prophet; but as a matter of courtesy and state service, he may find pardon from the Lord in this thing, which, though not idolatry itself, would obviously favour idolatry before others. And what is the prophet's answer? Does he say it shall be so, or is his reply equivalent to this? We think not; he simply rejoins, "Go in peace." Do not perplex yourself about this inquiry; it is not worth our entering upon at present. I neither approve

nor condemn ; in the end all will be well. He saw that the new convert was sincere ; he saw that the great work, the change of heart, had been effected by the Spirit of God ; and he knew, as his Divine Master in after ages so wisely and mercifully taught, that it was not good to “put old wine into new bottles,” and to load the tender feelings of the weak disciple with duties, most painful and difficult even to the strongest, or to expose him at once to the most trying of all opposition, the sneers and sarcasms of his companions.

Elisha foresaw, that the time would come when Naaman would himself see the impropriety of even the slightest conformity to a guilty and an accursed idolatry ; when he would refuse, even for the friendship of his king, to hazard the approval of the King of kings ; when the seed so lately sown, and now scarcely in the blade, would become the strong and powerful tree ; and he was content to wait for this. He therefore treated the tender plant with gentleness, and neither broke the bruised reed, nor quenched the smoking flax.

Is it, brethren, “the day of small things,” as the prophet terms it, with any whom I now address, then may they gather much scriptural encouragement from the narrative before us. They cannot at present receive difficult doctrines, or fulfil painful, self-denying duties, as many of their stronger brethren can. Cases are continually arising, as perplexing and as harassing to them as the house of Rimmon was to Naaman. May I partake of such an amusement ? May I innocently enter into such society ? Will the Lord pardon such an act of conformity to the world ? It is impossible to lay down any general rule which shall meet all cases, but of this be assured, that if you really feel the same anxiety to be guided by the will of God, and the same sincerity as Naaman, you will not long be left in difficulty upon any point of conduct, which is material to your happiness, either here or hereafter. Many of these things will at first be doubtful to you, but, by God’s grace, they will soon be made plain ; only be careful to act according to your convictions, to advance as they advance, to forsake every

thing offensive to God so soon as, by prayerful inquiry, you have discovered it to be so, and we venture to say, "Go in peace." You will never be left to perish in unknown or disregarded sin. Be careful only that, while you receive this example to your comfort, you do not take it to your injury; that you do not allow it to satisfy you, if in the commission of any known transgression, or in the disregard of any positive commandment, or while lagging tardily and carelessly on the Christian course, and ashamed of the Saviour, whom you desire to serve. We dare not say to you, "Go in peace," if this be the use you intend to make of the example before us, for "there is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked;" and few would more deserve that name than they who should endeavour to wrest such an example to such a purpose, to "sin that grace may abound." But it may, and ought to encourage you, whose feet have but lately been planted on the road that leads to Zion, to walk on cheerfully and happily, not being cast down by little failures; not driven to despair by the slowness of your advances; not rendered wretched because you perceive duties, which, with every desire most conscientiously to attend to, you are at present unable to fulfil: only bear in mind that "the path of the just is," invariably, "as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." Recollect that what might satisfy the prophet in the first few hours of Naaman's conversion, would have shocked him after as many years. That your Lord and Saviour, with all the tenderness which he so remarkably evinced during the whole of his earthly sojourn, for the young believer, made no exception in their favour when he said, "If *any man* be ashamed of me and of my words, of Him shall the Son of man be ashamed when he cometh in his glory, and with the holy angels;" "and *whosoever* shall deny me before men, him will I deny before the angels of God."

Naaman having, as we have seen, obtained the prophet's blessing, departed, and no doubt, like the Ethiopian in after ages, "went on his way rejoicing."

But the worst portion of our history yet remains to be told.

Gehazi, of whom nothing we have hitherto heard, has led us to form any very favourable opinion, appears to have been one among the many instances which mark, alas ! that proximity to grace differs widely from the possession of it ; that you may be the children of the most pious parents, or the servants of the most holy and religious families, or the constant attendants upon the most scriptural ministry, and yet remain as utterly destitute of all good, as the veriest outcast, before whom the name of God was never named.

The manner in which Gehazi is now introduced, acquaints us at once with his intentions and thoughts ; for the inspired writer presents him, while communing with himself. “ Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said, Behold, my master hath spared Naaman this Syrian, but, as the Lord liveth, I will run after him, and take somewhat of him.” “ As the Lord liveth !” yes, how lightly and how easily do the most solemn asseverations, the most awful oaths drop from the lips of reckless, ungodly men. What is the nature of the deed which Gehazi so unscrupulously calls God to witness ? “ As the Lord liveth,” he will follow the Syrian, and deceive, and rob him. He was shortly to be taught, that what he thus said in thoughtlessness, should be impressed upon his soul, with an emphasis he little dreamed of ; that he should soon, not only know, but feel that “ the Lord liveth,” and should carry the proof of it in his countenance until his dying day. How many a man shall find, hereafter, that the horrible oath, the thoughtless imprecation, “ the swearer’s prayer,” so continually heard in our streets, has been heard also by the God whom it insults, and “ as the Lord liveth,” it shall have its full accomplishment upon the souls of the speakers. “ So Gehazi followed after Naaman. And when Naaman saw him running after him, he lighted down from the chariot to meet him.”

It is pleasing to observe that the humility of Naaman does not exist merely while standing before Elisha. He is as willing to descend from his chariot to greet the prophet’s servant, as he had once been unwilling to humble himself even in the

prophet's own presence. And Naaman said, "Is all well?" And Gehazi said, "All is well;" and doubtless so he thought. It was well that his master had not seen him leave the tower; it was well that he was received thus courteously, and had so fair a hope that he should cheat this Syrian, and grow rich at his expense, and escape detection. And so the sinner says, "All is well," while hiding his guilty practices from those around him; and so the adulteress, in the Proverbs, is represented, "she eateth, and wipeth her mouth, and saith, I have done no wickedness;"* each thinking that no eye has borne witness to the crime. But could Gehazi have seen the leprosy which even then was hanging over his devoted head, could the hardened sinner view the gulf which even now is yawning at his feet, we doubt if either of them would so readily reply, "All is well." No! all may doubtless be well in the prospect, and often in the committal of sin, but all will not be well, when in the day of righteous judgment, God shall smite the sinner until he destroy him. "The mill of God grinds late, but grinds to powder."

"My master hath sent me," continues the false-hearted Gehazi, "saying, Behold, even now there be come to me from Mount Ephraim two young men of the sons of the prophets;" inferring, therefore, that they had arrived quite unexpectedly, and since Naaman's departure. "Give them, I pray thee, a talent of silver, and two changes of garments." The grateful Syrian, no doubt rejoicing that he could, out of his abundance, make some little return to the prophet, replies, "Be content, take two talents. And he urged him," even Gehazi having some hesitation, as it appears, to possess himself of so large a sum, "and bound two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of garments, and laid them upon two of his servants; and they bare them before him." A large and heavy burden, for, independently of the raiment, there were nearly seven hundred pounds sterling in silver. "And when he came to the tower, he took them from their hand, and bestowed them in

* Prov. xxx. 20.

the house." We can well imagine his anxiety, while conveying his ill-gotten treasures to a place of safety ; how cautiously does he ascertain whether his master had inquired for him during his absence ; how carefully does he take them from Naaman's servants, and "let the men go," that there might be no witnesses to his guilt.

And now "all," certainly, "is well," for his project has thoroughly succeeded. So "he went in, and stood before his master." What a climax to his duplicity and effrontery ! He returned from his robbery and falsehood, as if nothing had happened, and "stood before his master."

My brethren, we have all voluntarily come to God's house to-day, to stand before our Master ; is there no one here present, whose conscience, while viewing this point in the narrative we are considering, whispers to him, "Thou art the man ?" Thou hast come to stand before God, after that act of dishonesty, after those words of falsehood, after those secret, but habitual sins of uncleanness, of uncharitableness, or of lust. How fearful is the guilt to stand before God, with a countenance unabashed, but with unforsaken sin within the heart ! God is not mocked ; the habitual falsifier, the hidden thief, the disguised sensualist, the secret adulterer, may all come to God's house of prayer, and stand before their Master, as Gehazi before Elisha ; but that God who sees the heart, sees through the flimsy veil of hypocrisy which hangs so loosely over it, and knows the guilt, and corruption, and deceit which are lurking there, and has himself pronounced, in reference to all such, "The prayer of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord." Be careful, then, that you come not thus before the presence of a holy and heart-searching God ; that you enter not into his house ; that you fall not low before his footstool with any unrepented, unforsaken sin. For, be ye sure, that so long as one sin is cherished and intentionally persevered in, it is deadening your prayers, hardening your heart, ruining your soul ; and, after all, is, in reality, like Gehazi's, deceiving no one but yourself. Attempt not, then, to stand before your Master, until you

have deeply sorrowed for your transgressions, and earnestly and faithfully sought pardon at the hands of your offended God, through the blood of the "one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."* For if our Lord himself could say, "First be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift," have not we, the ambassadors of that Saviour, great and urgent cause to say, First be reconciled to thy Master, and then come and offer thy prayers.

Continuing the history, we read, "And Elisha said unto him, Whence comest thou, Gehazi? And he said, Thy servant went no whither." Miserable man. He attempts to cover his robbery with a direct and positive falsehood: of all sins, at once the most despicable, and we fear we must add, the most common. It was the first sin which entered into the world, and judging by the experience of every succeeding age, will be the last to leave it. Yet if there be a sin which God has marked by the tokens of his Divine displeasure, in the shape of temporal judgments, more strongly than any other, it is this sin of lying. To urge the people of the world to forsake it, is utterly hopeless, it forms the very soul of their intercourse, it gives the last polish to their compliments, the last gilding to their courtesies, the last finish to their politeness; it is the strong chain, without which their hollow society, as at present constituted, would fall to pieces. For who could tolerate sincerity, where the truth would often be so bitterly distasteful! But, Christian brethren, "What have we to do to judge them that are without?" for "them that are without God judgeth."† Let us who make some profession of religion, judge ourselves, and see that the evil cleave not unto us. Let us avoid, carefully and prayerfully, every approach to a sin so utterly subversive of true Christian intercourse, and so destructive to our Christian character. "I have no greater joy, than to hear that my children walk in truth," is the testimony of the beloved apostle. "Wherefore putting away lying," as St. Paul says, endeavour, as far as you are able, to avoid every equivocation, every trifling

* 1 Epistle of Tim. ii. 5.

† 1 Cor. v. 12.

evasion, exaggeration, or deception, and "speak every man truth with his neighbour : for, we are members one of another."*

If Gehazi supposed that he could deceive the Spirit of prophecy, and lie successfully unto God the Holy Ghost, a single moment was sufficient to convince him of his folly, and to fix upon himself and upon his seed for ever, the due reward of his sin. Listen only to the withering remonstrance of his justly offended master ; " And Elisha said unto him, Went not mine heart with thee, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee ? Is it a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep and oxen, and men-servants, and maid-servants ? " All of which Gehazi had no doubt intended to purchase with the rich booty that he thought he had secured. " The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee and unto thy seed for ever. " How horrible, and yet how just ! The tormenting and loathsome and incurable malady fell at once upon the unhappy culprit. " And he went out from the prophet's presence a leper as white as snow. "

Brethren, there is not, perhaps, throughout the whole of the eventful history which we are reviewing, a more awakening, or a more instructive fact, than that which led to this detection and punishment of Gehazi. His indignant master's eye had seen, and his heart had accompanied him, through all the tortuous road of his dishonesty and falsehood. " Went not mine heart with thee ? " is the language which at once reveals the secret witness of his guilt. Mark well then the lesson which is so plainly taught us. If the prophet had the power, thus to follow his servant into his most secret retirements, and to be witness of his most concealed and guilty actions, what must be the power of that Being who could communicate such a supernatural gift to Elisha. And while it magnifies the power, how forcibly does it illustrate the omnipresence, of our God. " If I ascend up into heaven, " says the Psalmist, " thou art there :

* Ephes. iv. 25.

if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea ; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.”*

How awakening a reflection. Go whither you will, you cannot go beyond the presence of God. You never withdraw into the most secret chamber, and shut to the door, to meditate upon a scheme of wickedness, or to perpetrate an act of sin, but one person more was present than you bethought yourself, and that person was God.

You never entered into scenes of immorality, or profligacy, however unsuspected by those whose opinion you valued, or whose displeasure you feared, that there was not one heart present, upon which you little calculated. “Went not mine heart with thee?” saith the Lord.

But while we would suggest this consideration, to awaken and convict the sinner, there is also much, very much in it, which ought powerfully and encouragingly to influence the people of God. Shall it be, that the thought of an ever present God is painfully oppressive to the world, and shall it not be sweetly consolatory to the Christian? Surely, of all God’s attributes, none can be selected that is calculated to afford those among you, who are desiring to live in all holy obedience to a reconciled Father, such strong and blessed consolation. Only remember, while you dwell upon this great truth, that God is with you, not merely in any *one* of His attributes, as His justice, His eternity, or His power, for this would fearfully distress the heart, even of the holiest of his people ; but recollect that wherever God is, all His attributes are gathered together, all His perfections present, as they were in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. If, therefore, you are in difficulties, think of Him as a God, present in wisdom, and you shall secure a guide ; in weakness, as a God of strength, and you shall not want a supporter ; in sorrow, as a God of consolation, and you shall never need a friend. Bearing this in mind, let

* Ps. cxxxix. 8-10.

us dwell for a few moments practically upon some of the encouragements of this high doctrine, the omnipresence of our God.

Are you engaged, and I trust that many whom I now address are so employed, in any good and holy work, in the service of your heavenly Father, how "strengthening and refreshing" to your souls to hear, "Went not mine heart with thee," in that labour of love; in that work of self-denial; to the house of that poor sufferer, where, while bestowing kind and bountiful relief to his temporal necessities, thou didst not forget to remind him of my blessed promises and soul-saving truths? "Went not mine heart with thee," when thou gavest up hours of domestic comfort, to assist my ministers, to teach my schools, to instruct the little ones of my flock? "Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these, ye did it unto me."

When you retire, and I speak now to the poorest and the lowest of my hearers, when you retire to your humble dwellings, and take down the book of God, and meditate upon its blessed promises, and pray, perhaps, in utter solitude, over its life-giving doctrines and its holy precepts, and think, that no eye can see, and no heart can sympathize with you, is it not "a joy, with which a stranger intermeddleth not," to know, to feel that a Father's heart and a Father's eye are there, seeing what the world cannot see, and valuing highly, and hereafter rewarding openly, what the world, if it saw, would only despise and condemn? Yes, "Went not mine heart with thee?" is an inquiry as cheering to you, as it is appalling to the sinner.

Again, when the Christian wife, or mother, watches in faith and patience, beside the sick-bed of a beloved husband, or a dying child, is it nothing to know, and to experience, that there is always present, One who is "touched with a feeling of our infirmities," who has declared, "In all their affliction, I am afflicted," and who will not, and who cannot leave you, who will watch with you, through those hours of lonely darkness, and give you strength for the most arduous duties, and peace under the most afflictive and trying visitations? And, at last,

when the days of personal trial shall come, as come they must, to the youngest, the healthiest, the strongest among us, "Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, and the spirit returns unto God who gave it,"* who can tell how great and blessed will be the consolation which this high truth and attribute of our God shall bestow? At such an hour, perhaps the memory of many an infirmity and sin, of which we now enjoy every hope that it is pardoned, will be forced back upon the conscience, by the great accuser of the brethren, who is then almost invariably present, striving to torment, where he cannot destroy. How comforting will the feeling be, that He also is with us, who has set His foot, as conqueror, upon the serpent's head, and who has said, "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud thy sins," "there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." You may be, for many are at such an hour, unable to join together two words of connected prayer, or to give utterance to one holy aspiration: then again, how blessed is the fact, that He is present, even Jesus the Mediator, "who ever liveth to make intercession for you," and will pray for you, when you cannot utter one syllable of prayer for yourself. And when all is over, and the fainting heart and the closing eye too plainly tell that the last struggle is ending, the last victory to be won, words cannot, for words have never yet described, the blessedness, at such a time, of an ever-present Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, who has said, My rod and my staff shall comfort thee, and when thy heart and thy flesh faileth, I am the strength of thy heart, and thy portion for ever. Brethren, be assured that the Christian's highest solace here, will also be his highest joy throughout the ages of eternity, the abiding presence of his God, for it is this, which alone can constitute heaven. "I go to prepare a place for you; that WHERE I AM, there ye may be also."

* Eccl. xii. 6.

LECTURE VI.

2 KINGS VI. 17.

“ And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man ; and he saw : and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.”

IN the last incident that formed a portion of the history we are reviewing, we were led, by the astonishing power vouchsafed to Elisha, to dwell upon that most wonderful attribute of the Almighty which it so strikingly illustrated—the omnipresence of God. The narrative which is this day to occupy our attention, will convey to our minds an equally convincing evidence of another attribute of the great Jehovah, in which we are, as individuals, as deeply and feelingly interested—the omniscience of the Almighty. May the conviction of this great truth take full possession of our minds, that remembering that “ all things are naked, and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do,”* we may learn to live and speak, and think, as continually within the ken of His all-seeing eye, and the hearing of His all-hearing ear.

Commencing with the eighth verse of the sixth chapter, we read, “ Then the king of Syria warred against Israel, and took counsel with his servants, saying, In such and such a place shall be my camp. And the man of God sent unto the king of Israel, saying, Beware that thou pass not such a place ; for thither the Syrians are come down. And the king of Israel sent to the place which the man of God told him and warned him of, and saved himself there, not once or twice. Therefore the heart of the king of Syria was sore troubled for this thing ; and he called his servants, and said unto them, Will ye not show me which of us is for the king of Israel ? And one of his servants said, None, my lord, O king : but Elisha, the

* Heb. iv. 13.

prophet that is in Israel, telleth the king of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bedchamber."

What an astonishing power was this which the Almighty communicated to his prophet! The words spoken in the innermost recesses of the Syrian palace, were made known to a resident in a foreign land, to enable him to frustrate the evil designs of him who spake them. And this, says the narrative, "Not once or twice;" to mark that it was no accident, no mere coincidence, but that all the words, and every word, spoken by the king of Syria, were divulged by the Spirit of God unto Elisha.

It is merciful, brethren, that God has been pleased to give us such plain illustrations of some of the most awful, and, at the same time, the most incomprehensible attributes of Deity.

There is, perhaps, no characteristic of the Almighty, so absolutely necessary to our right conception of a God, yet so difficult to understand, and, at the same time, so powerfully influential when justly apprehended, as His omniscience. It is upon the practical effect of this attribute on our own hearts and lives, that I desire to address you this morning. Let me illustrate what that effect ought to be, and what, if this attribute is rightly received, it really will be, by an example from the history of our Church. It is related of Bishop Latimer, that when called up for private examination before his Popish persecutors, he was at first not very particular as to the expressions he made use of, in his replies, "But," added that holy martyr, when narrating the circumstance, "I soon heard the pen going behind the arras, and found that all I said was taken down, and then I was careful enough of what I uttered." Such, brethren, will be the effect of a sincere belief in this high attribute of the Almighty, upon your own lives and conversations. If once you can only realize the fact, that while you are acting, talking, thinking, upon earth, the pen is going in heaven, that every word and every thought is known and recorded there, as soon as it is uttered or engendered here, we shall have no more careless, thoughtless, inconsistent

walking. No, the eye of a child would have prevented many a deed, of which your heart and consciences are ashamed, and shall the eye of an all-seeing God do less? Can you believe that God knows all, sees all, hears all, that passes, and yet scarcely ever be influenced by it for a single moment? It is impossible. If you are thus indifferent, you do not really believe in an omniscient God. For instance, you affect to be restrained from outward actions lest you disobey God, and yet you do not blush to entertain the most unholy, licentious, uncharitable, or ambitious thoughts. If you possessed a real faith in the omniscience of God there could not be this difference. You might, and you certainly would still offend, both in thoughts and deeds, but you would as certainly exercise at least the same degree of discipline over your thoughts as over your actions, because you would feel that to a God of perfect knowledge, they were synonymous. Is not, then, the true motive, that we are all of us so much more cautious with regard to actions and words, than to thoughts and desires, simply this? We know that man can take cognizance of the former, and that human laws and conventional arrangements which are violated will be redressed; while in spite of our disavowal of it, we do not absolutely realize the fact, that God is perfectly acquainted with the latter. We can hardly conceive, in the depths of our own minds, that the carrying forth an unholy thought into an unholy action, renders it not in the least degree more palpable, or better known to God. This is practical unbelief, and little short of positive Atheism. We say that God is, all eye, all ear, all knowledge, and we live as if He were absolutely blind, and deaf, and ignorant.

But again, as we endeavoured to derive comfort as well as warning from the consideration of the omnipresence of God, so would we also from His omniscience. Perhaps, practically, there are few temptations more besetting, even to the renewed Christian, the sincere worshipper of God, than this, a secret lurking unbelief upon the subject of his prayers. In the great events of life, we all go with some degree of confidence to a

throne of grace, but how few are there, who with equal faith and equal confidence carry thither the little events of every day, and hour, which passes over them ?

But, brethren, consider, could the Almighty make Elisha acquainted with every word spoken by the King of Syria in his bedchamber, and shall not God himself hear every prayer, and number every petition which ascends from yours ? It cannot be otherwise ; believe, then, to your unspeakable comfort, that not the faintest sigh, arising from a broken and a contrite heart, although clogged and crowded by the millions of similar aspirations which are perpetually ascending from a suffering world, but is still known to God, with every particular of the wants and weaknesses of him who utters it, as perfectly, as distinctly, as if throughout the illimitable realms of space that one sigh alone was breathed, that one petition offered. There is a little incident in our Lord's life which beautifully illustrates this. When Jesus was upon his way to one of his many miracles of mercy, surrounded by the crowds who on such occasions usually attended him, a certain poor, diseased woman came behind Him, and touched only the hem of His garment, and immediately was made whole ; yet at that very moment hundreds of others also were crowding around the Saviour as he passed along ; for St. Peter said, " Master, the multitude press thee and throng thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me ? " How perfect must have been the knowledge which could discriminate that single touch of faith ! How perfect the power, as well as the love, by which its unuttered prayer was known and answered ! Who shall doubt, then, that the same wonderful attribute is, at the present hour, exercised with regard to the feeblest petition which faith can offer, to the faintest aspiration which confiding love can breathe. Surely not one, but shall, through the merits of our ever blessed Intercessor, ascend to the abode, and enter into the ears of the Lord God Almighty.

The king of Syria, finding that all his plans were frustrated by the supernatural intelligence of Elisha, resolved upon suspending his attack against the king of Israel and turning his

arms entirely against the prophet. "And he said, Go and spy where he is, that I may send and fetch him. And it was told him, saying, Behold, he is in Dothan. Therefore sent he thither horses, and chariots, and a great host: and they came by night, and compassed the city about. And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an host compassed the city, both with horses and chariots." Panic-stricken at the appalling sight, the terrified servant hastened back to his master and said unto him, "Alas, my master! how shall we do?" Gehazi had, as you will remember, been lately dismissed in disgrace, and the prophet's present servant had filled the office but a short time; he could not, therefore, have been expected to be very well acquainted with the wonder-working powers of him he had served, and this will readily account for his easily awakened fears, and his deeply desponding inquiry, "What shall we do?" Brethren, we can make every allowance for the fear of the new servant, but it would have been dishonourable to himself, and disparaging to his master, if the same despondency had been manifested, the same want of confidence evinced, after years of servitude had been passed beneath the prophet's roof, and multitudes of miracles had been witnessed there. What shall we say, then, of ourselves? And I speak now to such of you as have not newly been numbered among the servants of God; you who have often received comfort within His house, and long lived happily in His service, and found his yoke easy and His burden light, and are ready cheerfully to acknowledge that He is a good, and kind, and merciful master, and who do not and cannot deny the many miracles of which you have been the daily witnesses, for surely goodness and mercy have followed you all the days of your life; and yet the moment that unexpected difficulties assail, or unthought of dangers threaten you, how often has your "soul been melted because of the trouble," and you are "at your wits' end." Is it not too true, that even among sincere Christians we frequently witness this evidence of faithlessness, this unworthy distrustfulness of God; as if

they had never been in trouble before, or being so, had never been relieved. It seems as if there were almost a stunning effect produced upon the mind by great and sudden calamities, which for the moment appears to deprive faith of its ascendancy, and even prayer of its power. Wave after wave passes over us, and each seems more likely than the former, to wash us from our resting-place, and to carry us out into the dark and dreary ocean of despair. It is not till time for recollectedness is given, time to call to mind those "exceeding great and precious promises," the true sustenance of the Christian, that our faith can regain her firm and steady anchorage upon the Rock of Ages.

And Elisha answered his servant, "Fear not; for they that be with us are more than they that be with them." It was in vain to tell him this, the young man looked around, and saw visibly enough, the chariots and horsemen of Syria, which were sent to capture them, but he saw no defenders; Elisha and he apparently stood helpless and alone; and what were they against so many? It is useless to assure the man whose eyes are closed to the great and wonderful things which even here God has prepared for those who love Him, that "as his day, so shall his strength be;" but once let him behold them with the eye of a true and living faith, and every fear shall vanish: he sees a hand the world can never see, he hears a voice they cannot hear.

"And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man: and he saw, and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha." Yes, brethren, prayer will succeed, where reasoning fails. When the prophet had prayed, "open his eyes," when the Lord had answered, and the young man's eyes were opened, then his defenders were made visible to him, and he who found himself at once surrounded by the hosts of heaven, no longer feared the horses and chariots of Syria. Then he knew with a knowledge which nothing could invalidate, that the prophet spake but the truth,

when he said, "They that be with us are more than they that be with them." How difficult is it, without a vision, absolutely to realize a promise. "Blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have believed." It was just as certain, just as true, that the hills round about the city, were occupied by chariots and horses of fire, before the young man saw them, as when his eyes were open and all were visible. And so are the Christian's consolations, and the Christian's safeguards, equally real, equally certain, at the time when the eye of faith is dullest, and her apprehensions the most clouded, as when we are living in the brightest sunshine, and enjoying the clearest vision. Our sight of them may and often will vary, but their existence, and our possession of them, blessed be God, never varies.

Endeavour to establish this truth, brethren, distinctly and firmly in your hearts, you will find it a remedy for many an hour of nature's keenest anxieties, and most desponding doubts.

When you feel your temptations crowding upon you, with so resistless a pressure, that you are almost led to fear that you never possessed an interest in the great and blessed promises which you have received; when your heart, like Israel's of old, is much "discouraged because of the way," and with David you are ready to exclaim, "I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul," then turn in peace to the thousand declarations of your Redeemer, which establish this most blessed truth, that though you see them not, the chariots and horses of heaven are there; that "the angel of the covenant," even the Lord Jesus Christ himself, "encampeth around" you, and "fear not." Sin, Satan, the world, may have their slaves, their votaries, their hosts, all arrayed powerfully against you, but they that be with you are, after all, more than they that be with them; you have the felt presence of God the Father, the abiding consolations of God the Son, the uninterrupted fellowship of God the Holy Ghost; the spiritual communion with "the church of the first-born, whose names are written in heaven." "When the enemy comes in like a flood," it is thus that "the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him."

Elisha having, as we have seen, encouraged the sinking heart of his servant, remained calmly in Dothan, awaiting the approach of his implacable enemies. At length, encompassing the city, so that he could neither break through nor escape, they drew their circle nearer and nearer, until having entirely enclosed him within their toils, they came down upon him as their certain and unresisting prey. And now again was seen the mighty achievement of "the effectual, fervent prayer of the righteous man, which availeth much." A single heartfelt ejaculation, a single earnest petition, and all the machinations of his foes were frustrated, all their opposition fruitless. "Elisha prayed unto the Lord, and said, Smite this people, I pray thee, with blindness. And he smote them with blindness, according to the word of Elisha. And Elisha said unto them, 'This is not the way,' i. e. to find the prophet, "neither is this the city," in which you shall see him. "Follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom ye seek. And he led them to Samaria," the capital of Israel, about twelve miles distant. "And it came to pass, when they were come into Samaria," even into the crowded streets of that populous city, that Elisha said, "Lord, open the eyes of these men, that they may see. And the Lord opened their eyes, and they saw; and, behold, they were in the midst of Samaria." Who can picture their astonishment and dismay? In the heart of a hostile city, surrounded by their deadliest foes, who only waited the signal to immolate them at once to their fury; whichever way they turned, nothing was to be seen but enemies, nothing to be looked for but destruction and death. With what a remarkable contrast does the answer to the two prayers of the prophet for precisely similar blessings, here present us. Elisha prayed that his servant's eyes might be opened, and no sooner was the blessing granted, than every sight which surrounded him was full of encouragement and consolation. He prayed again that his enemies' eyes might be opened, and who can recount the terror and dismay which followed the accomplishment of that petition. We have seen the blessedness of the people of God,

as manifested in the Christian's experience, when the eye of faith is opened to its privileges and its rewards. Now let us turn our thoughts to the enemies of God, to those who, like the Syrians, are yet walking in darkness and the shadow of death, and mark the contrast, when their eyes shall be opened.

Are there none, brethren, dwelling around us in the world, none, perhaps, even among ourselves, of whom we have reason to fear that "the god of this world" hath blinded their eyes to the peculiar circumstances of danger in which they stand? none who are in the midst of enemies and know it not? Can we for a moment doubt it? can we for a moment question it? Alas! is it not too easily demonstrated by the testimony of the written Word of God?

Let me apply myself particularly to you, if such there be, who are living a life of thoughtlessness upon this high subject; the consideration, perhaps, never crossing your mind, that there are unseen realities above you, unseen perils around you, the very sight of which will one day make the boldest quail, and the strongest tremble; yet to these things your hearts are closed. For instance, the eternal God has said, "He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God."*

You believe not; i. e., you are not trusting with a simple, justifying faith, to the Saviour of sinners, and making His atoning sacrifice your only hope, His righteousness your only plea, and His will your only law. Yet you do not see that you "are condemned already." No; you would consider it the very height of uncharitableness, if you were individually told it. And whence is this? Simply because your eyes are not opened. Like the Syrians, of whom we have read, you do not perceive either where you are, or whither you are going. Like them, you are walking cheerfully and thoughtlessly upon your journey, without a single misgiving as to that journey's end. And yet it is equally certain with you, as with them, that the path you are treading must, if persevered in, lead down to death.

Again, the same God who cannot lie, has said, "She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth." Do I address none who live in pleasure, no one whose life, and thoughts, and time, are chiefly occupied in self-gratification, self-pleasing? And do you not see that, according to the scriptural meaning of the term, you are dead? i. e., dead, while in your present state, to the promises and hopes of the Gospel, dead to the brightest reversions of eternity? No, not an individual to whom I speak, has the slightest belief in such a fact; though day and night be given to pleasure, though your whole heart be in the world, and no single power of the mind, or affection of the soul, be fully devoted to God, you deny the impeachment, and believe at this moment, as firmly as you ever did, that all this is quite compatible with being a Christian here, and a glorified spirit hereafter. Yes, though God himself has said, that it shall not, and it cannot be. And why, again, is this? Simply because your eyes are not opened. It is the unquestionable fact; no man who reads his Bible, and believes his God, can deny it; but you see it not, and know it not.

Brethren, God knows that it is deeply painful to me to state these humiliating truths; that I should infinitely rather say to you all, and think of you all, that your eyes are clearly open, and that you are so living in the fear, and love, and service of your God, that no doubt shall agonize your dying bed, no despair sadden the eternity that shall follow. But I dare not do so. There are many among you whom I shall probably never address again; and shall we part with the language of flattery and deceit? Shall I hesitate to declare, or you to hear the whole truth, because it is a painful truth? God forbid! He has commanded us rightly to divide the word of truth, giving to each his portion in due season; and yours cannot, while you are living thus, be the portion of consolation and peace. If, by God's grace, we could only reveal to you your own state; only make you conscious of your mental darkness; only enable you to feel that you are blind, most assuredly you would not one of you leave this house to-day, without the

earnest heart-felt prayer, Lord, that my eyes may be opened, that I may behold the utter emptiness of these things to which I am devoting so large a portion of my thoughts, my time, my affections ; that I may awake before it be too late, and turn with a whole heart to the Saviour and his salvation. For, listen to these most solemn words of inspiration, which man can neither alter, nor soften, nor evade, “ If our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost.” What a word,—“ to them that are LOST ;” and if lost here, never to be found at God’s right hand throughout eternity. But mark the continuation of the text, and see to whom it refers. “ In whom the god of this world hath blinded the eyes of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.” LOST, because they have suffered the god of this world to blind their eyes. Have we not then reason to call upon you, until the sound ring in your ears night and day, banishing all rest, all peace, all satisfaction from your present lot, and until this command has been obeyed, this promise realized, “ Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.”

But, brethren, there is yet one consideration connected with this subject, which must not be suppressed. That, blind as we may some of us be at the present moment, the time approaches when every eye shall be open to our real state, and we shall all see, clearly, distinctly, and for ever. We thought the situation of the Syrian host a fearful one, when their judicial blindness was for the first time removed, in the midst of an enemy’s city, surrounded by foes ready to destroy them.

But what was that compared with the first glimpses of returning vision, upon the morning of the resurrection, to the unsaved sinner ? Before his eyes “ the great white throne” of the descending Judge, and Him that shall sit on it, from whose face the earth and the heavens shall flee away. Round about the throne, ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands “ of the angelic host ; and before the throne, all nations gathered together ; the dead, small and great, standing before

God." There shall be no blindness then ; no mental darkness shall outlive that hour, for the Word of God has declared, "every eye shall see him." Who can describe the misery of seeing Him for the first time as a Judge, whom we have never seen as a Saviour and a Friend ? How peculiarly solemn is the thought, that this congregation, promiscuously brought together as it has been, during the present season, and containing, as all such assemblages must, the wheat and the tares, the righteous and the sinner, him that feareth God and him that feareth him not, shall, in all human probability, may we not say with all certainty, never re-assemble until that hour ; that we, brethren, shall not meet again until our "eyes are opened ;" and until we awake to judgment, at the trump of the archangel.

My beloved brethren, may God preserve us from the melancholy fate of that apostate prophet, who "heard the words of God, and knew the knowledge of the Most High," and who is emphatically called, "the man whose eyes were opened : " and yet who, speaking of the "Star out of Jacob," and "the Holy One of Israel," left this his melancholy testimony, "I shall see him, but not now ; I shall behold him, but not nigh." Alas ! the wretchedness of seeing the Saviour of sinners but only afar off, as the rich man beheld Abraham, and no hope, no power of approaching within the circle of his saving grace, of his redeemed and glorified people. Would you behold Him near, would you see Him on that day with holy joy, then humble yourselves before Him now, close with his offers of grace this day, for they may never be repeated. Pray to be even now cleansed by His blood, sanctified by His spirit, prepared for His kingdom, and united to Him in an everlasting covenant, never to be forgotten. Then shall this be the feeling of your awakened hearts on that great day, "Lo, this is our God, we have waited for him, and He will save us ; this is the Lord, we will rejoice and be glad in his salvation."*

* This lecture forms the close of the series preached in London, on the Wednesday mornings during Lent, 1838.

LECTURE VII.

2 KINGS VII. 18. (part.)

“It came to pass as the man of God had spoken.”

WE resume the history of the prophet Elisha at a period of great public calamity, when the city of Samaria, in which he frequently resided, was visited by famine and the sword.

The Syrians, who had been taught by former failures, that it was vain to war against the prophet of the Lord, and therefore, as we learn from the 23d verse of the chapter preceding that from which the text is taken, “came no more into the land of Israel” for that purpose, now resolved upon besieging the capital itself; not knowing, probably, that the man they most dreaded was within its walls, and evidently not fearing that any Divine interposition should be exerted in his behalf.

For a time, all things prospered with the enemies of the Lord, and of his people. Samaria was reduced to such extremity of famine, that as in after ages, in Jerusalem itself, the most loathsome food was greedily consumed; “an ass’s head was sold for fourscore pieces of silver, and the fourth-part of a cab, about a half-a-pint of dove’s dung,” (which, according to Shaw, the traveller, is a kind of peas or parched pulse eaten by the Jews,) was sold “for five pieces of silver;” while humanity is unwilling to record the horrible enormities which necessity forced upon the guilty and perishing inhabitants.

In this extremity of suffering, all eyes were turned upon Elisha. The king himself, whose better judgment was overthrown for the moment by the horrors around him, and who in the intensity of his anguish had vowed the prophet’s death, comes in person to revoke the sentence, and stands as a humble suppliant at Elisha’s door.

Then Elisha said, “Hear ye the word of the Lord; thus saith the Lord, to-morrow, about this time, shall a measure of fine flower be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria.”

To-morrow, no further off than to-morrow, the wheat and barley now absolutely unknown within the city, shall be sold "in the gate,"* at the prices for which they were usually purchased.

How extremely improbable ! yet mark, how confidently does this man of God rely upon its fulfilment.

It is enough for Elisha, that, "Thus saith the Lord ;" he was probably as utterly ignorant of the manner in which so remarkable a saying should be fulfilled, as the most uninformed of those around him, and yet he is as perfectly certain that it should come to pass, as if he had seen the heavens opened, and the golden showers of plenty descend from the everlasting garner. And such in every age is not merely the duty, but the high and holy privilege of the people of God, if we may so speak, to take God instantly at His word ; "Hath He said, and shall He not do it ? or hath He spoken, and shall it not come to pass ? that be far from thee, O Lord, that be far from thee." Brethren, a true Christian would rather have "It may be" from God, than "It shall be" from all the kings of the earth.

Not such, however, was the holy confidence of those around the prophet ; the king, perhaps, who had beheld so many proofs of Elisha's knowledge and of his Master's power, might have no doubt ; but there was one unhappy man, who boldly questioned even the possibility of the relief which Elisha thus confidently promised, and ventured sneeringly to express his contempt of the prediction in the most insulting inquiry. For the inspired historian relates, "then a lord, on whose hand the king leaned, answered the man of God, and said, Behold, if the Lord would make windows in heaven, might this thing be ?" Do you think that it would be possible then ? And Elisha said, "Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof." Thou shalt live to be convinced of the folly of thy scoff, but shalt never profit by the conviction.

Would that men would learn by the experience of others ;

* The accustomed market-place.

but alas ! of this there is small hope, since so many do not seek to benefit, even by their own. Else should we say, brethren, are there any of you here present who have often listened, it may be attentively, but perhaps incredulously, or at least ineffectually, to the declarations of God, as revealed to us by his Son, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ ; who have often heard the ministers of God declare those “ exceeding great and precious promises,” that “ the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin,” that “ whosoever will, may take of the waters of life freely ;” that the heavenward path is open, the offers of eternal life fully and freely dispensed, and that all who hear, may live ; that great as may be your present difficulties, the present barrenness and dearth of the soul, there is bread enough and to spare in your Father’s house, grace sufficient, and more than sufficient, to supply every need and every necessity of the most destitute of God’s creatures, and yet you believe not these abundant promises ? Yes, brethren, we fear we must say distinctly, that you believe not, for we are addressing those among you who do not accept them, who do not realize them in their own experience, who do not live by them and upon them, as they could not refrain from doing, if they absolutely and entirely believed them. No man ever yet believed that he was heir to a large inheritance, to be granted to his petition, and yet abstained from making a single request. No starving wretch ever yet believed that there was bread within his reach, to be given to his application, and yet never stretched out one beseeching hand, or offered one entreating prayer. Surely, then, you cannot but confess that, in reality, you believe not these exceeding great and precious promises, for which you never plead. Then, alas ! to you they will be as if they had never been ; as if they had never possessed any real and tangible existence.—No ! the paralled before us is nearer, and more exact than this ; “ Behold, thou shalt see them with thine eyes, but thou shalt not eat thereof.”

The promises shall be fulfilled, whether you believe or disbelieve them, whether you receive or reject them ; but alas ! if

you continue in your present state, you can only expect to witness, but never to participate their fulfilment. Or, in the deeply affecting language of Holy Writ, the days shall come, "when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out."*

For listen only to the conclusion of the history before us, and you will learn, that although God is, and ever has been, and ever shall be, love, yea love itself, to every soul that seeketh Him and trusteth in Him, "Our God is a consuming fire," to every individual who rejects His promises, and contemns the offers of His word.

It was in the night, the very night which succeeded the day upon which the prediction of Elisha was uttered, that the Almighty prepared its fulfilment, for, as the inspired historian relates, "The Lord made the host of the Syrians," which lay encamped before the famishing city, "to hear a noise of chariots, and a noise of horses, even a noise of a great host, and they said one to another, Lo, the king of Israel hath hired against us the king of the Hittites, and the kings of the Egyptians, to come upon us. Wherefore, they arose and fled in the twilight, and left their tents and their asses, even the camp as it was, and fled for their life."

It is not within the scope of these lectures to enter minutely into the singular and providential accident by which this desertion was discovered; my chief object throughout them is, to induce you carefully to search the Word of God for yourselves, while I can do little more than glance at it.

It is sufficient, therefore, for our present purpose to record, that intelligence having been brought to the king, that the Syrians had fled, he immediately despatched messengers to ascertain its truth. "And they went after them unto Jordan; and lo, all the way was full of garments and vessels which the Syrians had cast away in their haste; and the messengers returned and told the king. And the people went out and

* Luke xiii. 28.

spoiled the tents of the Syrians. So a measure of fine flour," adds the historian, "*was* sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, according to the word of the Lord:" and thus, as our text declares, "It came to pass as the man of God had spoken." Most certainly it did, and who that knows any thing of the power and faithfulness of our God, could for a moment doubt it. A sudden panic in the enemy's army, a sudden flight when no man pursued, and all the voluptuous plenty of an Eastern camp is at the disposal of the famished Israelites. How easy are man's impossibilities with God.

May we not then truly ask, If God so feed the natural man, who to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the grave, shall he not much rather feed you, the spiritual children of his love, who are to live for ever?

Repose in simple trust upon the declarations of our heavenly Father; believe that He who hath provided an all-sufficient Saviour, and an all-inviting heaven, hath not provided them in vain. The promise shall be sure to all the seed; He who hath given us His Son, shall with Him also, freely give us all things. All things needful to the fulfilment of Christ's purchase, the completion of God's covenant, and the salvation of each individual soul, that is led to cast itself unreservedly upon the Lord Jesus. Therefore, let the most timid believer, provided he be a believer, one who for the sake of Christ is willing to renounce sin, to follow after holiness, and to rely simply upon the Saviour as his all in all, thank God and take courage. Though your enemies be mighty, He who supports and strengthens you is almighty; though your trials bodily, mentally, or spiritually, be great, God's grace is infinitely greater; though the completion of God's promises to you appears almost impossible, when you consider your own absolute unworthiness, your utter sinfulness and helplessness; yet, when you consider God's faithfulness and truth, the Saviour's infinite merits, the Holy Spirit's abounding grace and consolations, you cannot but take courage, and remember, that the same voice which said, "I

give unto them eternal life," added in the self-same sentence, "and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand."

We may not, however, suffer ourselves, while dwelling thus upon the certainty of the encouraging promises of our God, so engaging and lovely a theme, to be led too far away from the narrative we are considering. Doubtless there are some among you who would desire to hear the conclusion of that man's story, upon whose infidelity and scorn, we have already commented; some who would desire to know what became of the unbelieving lord.

Continuing the history, therefore, at the 17th verse, we read, "And the king appointed the lord on whose hand he leaned to have the charge of the gate." No doubt, highly gratifying to his ambition and self-importance, was so distinguished an honour. But, now mark the all-present providence of God, and observe how it directs and overrules every, the minutest incident of our lives.

If we had been asked, how it would be possible most effectually to traverse the designs of the Almighty respecting this unbeliever, and to counteract the fulfilment of the prophecy, we should, perhaps, have selected the very means for its overthrow, which God appointed for its fulfilment. We should have said, "Place the unbeliever at the gate, his rank and office will secure respect, and he shall not only see, but he shall partake of the very first load of provisions which arrives." The Almighty also says, "Place him at the gate where he shall see the plenty in which he disbelieved, but no grain of which shall ever pass his lips." And thus it happened; for as the famishing multitude pressed forward in one dense mass out of the perishing city, to avail themselves of the cheap and unexpected market, which the mercy of God has opened for them, the people trampled the unbeliever to death beneath their feet; "and," continues the historian, "so it fell out unto him," as the man of God had said, "Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes,

but shalt not eat thereof," "for the people trode upon him in the gate, and he died."

"So it fell out unto him." Yes, brethren, be ye well assured that so it always falls out; even as God has said. There is no doubt, no chance, no probability in any thing which God has once uttered; though heaven and earth pass away, one jot, or one tittle of His word shall in no wise pass away, till all be fulfilled.

It is a very solemn reflection for the man who makes light of the denunciations of God, and for him who overlooks or despises them, that every threatening which has once passed the lips of the Almighty, is inscribed upon the same imperishable tablets, on which are engraven His mercy and His love. One cannot be fulfilled if the other be falsified. Yet no individual doubts the eternal happiness of God's people. How certain, then, must be the infliction of the woes which God has pronounced against the impenitent sinner! They are expressed precisely in the same terms; if the joys of heaven be certain and eternal, then are the pains of hell equally certain and eternal: if the happiness of the righteous be sure, then also is the fate of the unrighteous irrevocable. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die!" "He that believeth not, shall be damned." "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the people that forget God."

Dear brethren, are any of you living in the daily forgetfulness of God; we will not say in any open sin, or profaneness, but simply in the forgetfulness of God, your own ease, your own pleasure, your own business occupying your time, your thoughts, your hearts. Give me your serious attention for a few moments, while I endeavour to set before you the imminent peril in which you stand. We love not to dwell upon the punishment awaiting the ungodly; no, we would far rather never refer to it; we infinitely prefer beseeching you by the mercies of God. But how can we help applying such a warning as this before us, and how can you refrain from reading in it your own sentence, and your own fate?

God is neither mocking nor mocked ; he does not treat you as foolish parents are apt to treat their children, continually threatening them with punishments which they never intend to inflict. What God says, God invariably does. Now God has said, respecting each of us, who is living without Him in the world ; whose chambers witness no secret prayer ; no earnest searching into His revealed and written will ; whose daily life evinces no careful and consistent following of Him in honesty and sobriety, in chastity and charity, in holiness and self-denial ; whose heart, when read by His all-seeing eye, is still clothed in all its natural guilt and darkness and pollution, upon which the light of a Saviour's love has never dawned, and into which no humbling, abasing thoughts of self, and no grateful, confiding thoughts of Christ, have ever entered, God has said of all such individually that living thus and dying thus, they can never see his face in righteousness, they can never enter into His eternal rest.

Surely you do not doubt it ? Yes, you think that God is too merciful to accomplish His threatenings, too tender-hearted to inflict the punishment he has denounced ; so thought the people in the days of Noah ; so thought the inhabitants of Sodom ; so thought the dwellers in Jerusalem ; so thought the unbelieving lord ; and yet in every case it came to pass, fully, literally and entirely ; as God had spoken, "so it fell out." And be assured, so it must fall out with you. There is no variableness, neither shadow of turning with God. You cannot persevere in disobedience and unbelief, and yet be saved with an everlasting salvation. You cannot trifle with God's threatenings, and yet escape His condemnation. Earnestly, then, most earnestly would I entreat you, "Fly to the stronghold, ye prisoners of hope." For so God has Himself addressed you, to show that though imprisoned in unbelief there is still "hope ;" though the unbeliever is "condemned already,"* there is yet a reversal of the sentence possible ; though now a prodigal, and at a distance, there is yet room for him in a Father's house, and affection for him in a Father's heart. Again and again, there-

* See John iii. 18.

fore, we invite you to know the things which belong to your peace, before they are hidden from your eyes. "The Spirit and the Bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." For God willeth not the death of a sinner, but rather, yea, infinitely rather, that he should turn from his wickedness and live.

LECTURE VIII.

2 KINGS VIII. 5.

"And it came to pass, as he was telling the king how he had restored a dead body to life, that, behold, the woman, whose son he had restored to life, cried to the king for her house and for her land."

IN the early part of the history upon which we are commenting, we were deeply interested in the story of the wealthy Shunammite; who delighting in Elisha's society, and rejoicing to minister to his comfort, had built him a "little chamber," attached to the mansion in which she dwelt. The prophet's gratitude did not evaporate with the acceptable return which he was at the time enabled to render her, for her considerate kindness. Years had passed away, but probably had only cemented the more strongly the attachment of Elisha to this Shunammite's husband, her child and herself. And now a season was arriving when he was again to testify his friendship for this beloved family, by affording them an opportunity to escape a calamity in which their country would shortly be involved. The Lord was about to bring a famine upon Israel, and He who provided in the day of general destruction a refuge for holy Noah, would not permit the pious Shunammites to perish beneath the blow which overwhelmed the ungodly.

"Then spake Elisha unto the woman whose son he had restored to life, saying, Arise, and go thou and thine household,

and sojourn wheresoever thou canst sojourn ; for the Lord hath called for a famine ; and it shall also come upon the land seven years." She had, it appears, learnt by this time, entirely to trust the prophet's word. We do not now find her replying, as on the former occasion, "Nay, my lord, thou man of God, do not lie unto thy handmaid;" she requires nothing beyond the assertion of Elisha, to convince her of its truth ; and painful and difficult as such an effort must have been, the absolute relinquishment of her property, her friends her home, like Abraham of old, she makes it immediately and unreservedly at the bidding of the prophet.

"And the woman arose," continues the historian, "and did after the saying of the man of God ; and she went with her household, and sojourned in the land of the Philistines seven years."

How astonishing an act of faith ; in the midst of prosperity and plenty, she believes in the coming famine, and without one repining word, or one sceptical inquiry, she betakes herself to the appointed refuge. What an admirable contrast does this form to the conduct of "the unbelieving lord" in the last lecture.

The Shunammite no sooner hears, than she believes ; no sooner believes, than she acts. How well does it exemplify the nature of that faith to which we were so lately inviting you. A principle, which as soon as it is received, presses forward into action ; like hers of whom we read in Gospel history, whose new-born faith instantly impelled her to stretch forth her hand to the hem of the Saviour's garment ; or hers, who having believed, was forgiven much, and loved much, and found her greatest joy and highest blessedness, in doing "what she could ;"* in laying the costly offering of her gratitude, the first-fruits of her faith, amidst many misgivings, and many tears, at her Redeemer's feet.

But, brethren, we need not multiply examples. In all the

* See Mark xiv. 8.

true children of God, there is the same strong family likeness ; now I would entreat you to inquire, whether you have reason to believe that you participate in this resemblance ? We do not ask, where is your faith ? but where are the fruits of your faith ? The Shunammite was told to fly, as for her life, from a land doomed to suffer the punishment inflicted by God. You have been told in language as plain, and in warnings as incontrovertible, to fly from the sinful practices of a world, whose fate is as certain, whose sentence is as sure. The Shunammite arose and fled, without an hour's delay, a moment's question. And where are you ? Are you still dwelling in heart and desires and practice, among those of whom the Spirit of God hath said, "Come out from among them, and be ye separate?"* Though the soul's worst famine is not only threatened, but inflicted, are you content to sympathize with those, whose friendship to you, is enmity with God ? Alas ! how many professing Christians thus make shipwreck of their souls. Is there one here present who is conscious of his danger from evils such as these, the society, the friendship, the pursuits of those who know not God ? And does he inquire, what is his duty ? We reply, imitate the example of the Shunammite, arise and fly. Continue not with one companion whose ways are adverse to God's will ; in one habit which is opposed to God's law ; in one observance, or pursuit, which is contrary to the precepts, or the spirit of God's Gospel. Nothing short of this is faith ; nothing short of this can save you. Had the Shunammite believed the prophet with the most ready credulity, but still, like the sons-in-law of Lot, resolving not to act upon his warning, had remained in the land, while the tempest of God's wrath swept across its surface, though, no doubt, God might have saved her, as easily as her flight could save her, be assured she would have perished with those around her. So it will be with every professing Christian whose faith is not followed out into holy, consistent, persevering action. The

* 2 Cor. vi. 17.

faith which saves, is the faith which works, the faith which thus openly and consistently honours God, and which God therefore delighteth to honour.

Well might an apostle exclaim, "Show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works." Be assured, that there is no declaration of the revealed word more true, or more important, than the well-known assertion of the same apostle, that "faith without works is dead;" and dead to all the purposes of his being, and all the hopes of salvation, is that man's heart, which imagines it has received into it a principle so vital, so influential, so unceasingly operative as a true and living faith, and yet contentedly remains at rest, in the midst of God's enemies, and produces no fruit to God's glory.

Pursuing the history of the Shunammite, we next trace her return from the country of the Philistines, after the seven years of predicted famine had passed away, and find her once more a resident in the land of her nativity.

You will, possibly, remember that when commenting upon the former portion of her history, we were much struck with the magnanimity of her reply, to the proffered favour of Elisha; "Behold thou hast been careful for us with all this care," were the words of the grateful prophet, "What is to be done for thee? wouldest thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host? And she answered," with dignified contentment, "I dwell among mine own people."

Perhaps, as we at the time observed, there was some slight feeling of self-complacency mingled with this indifference to the offers of courtly patronage and kingly favour; some little trace of self-satisfaction, while looking round upon her large possessions, and declaring, that she needed nothing that the hand of man could bestow. We assert not, that such was the fact, but it is by no means unnatural that it should have been so, and if it were, the time had now arrived, which was to teach her, that in this world of strange vicissitudes, no human being is placed so far beyond the reach of accident and change, as to render him independent of the kind offices of his fellow-men,

or justify him in being careless of their regards. The very next time we are introduced to the Shunammite, we find her a suitor of that monarch, of whose protection she never expected to stand in need. "It came to pass at the seven years' end, that the woman returned out of the land of the Philistines, and she went forth to cry unto the king for her house and for her land." During her temporary absence, her possessions had been seized by some encroaching neighbour, or some false friend; and she who, but seven years before, is called in Scripture language, "a great woman," might now say with Naomi of old, "I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty." Happy are they who lay up treasures "where neither rust nor moth doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through or steal." Blessed are ye, brethren, whatever be your earthly possessions or advantages, who count them all as nothing, compared with the "inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you." That "riches make to themselves wings and flee away," is evidenced by the events of every hour which passes over us, and yet how few are engaged in endeavouring to fulfil this Divine direction, "I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations." So employ your wealth as good stewards, of Him, of whom the revealed word hath recorded, "The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of Hosts."* It is a duty to which we ought not to require such continual incitements; "freely ye have received, freely give," should be the Christian motto; and when the claims of the poor, or the wretched, or the ignorant, are urged upon us, we should not need to have our sympathies awakened, and our feelings excited, and our vanity propitiated, by long and laboured intercessions on their behalf. Neither should we too carefully inquire, What have we already contributed; but, what is needed? How greatly has God blessed and prospered me, and what can I bestow out

* Haggai ii. 8.

of my fulness, as a proof that at least I am not ungrateful for "mercies countless as the sands," with which He has surrounded me. Never did our Divine Master express a truth, with which the heart of every true child of God more entirely sympathizes, than when He said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

The Shunammite, as we have seen, was compelled to make application to the king, for the restoration of her property ; and now observe how remarkably her suit was prospered by the superintending providence of God. He, without whom not a sparrow falleth, and by whom the very hairs of our head are all numbered, so appointed it, that the moment of her application should be the most propitious that could have been selected, had she known every movement of the king, and chosen her own hour for an audience. Hear only the simple narration of the inspired historian, and I think that you cannot but be struck by the peculiar providence which attended her. "And the king talked with Gehazi, the servant of the man of God, saying, Tell me, I pray thee, all the great things that Elisha hath done. And it came to pass, as he was telling the king how he had restored a dead body to life, that, behold, the woman whose son he had restored to life, cried to the king for her house and for her land." She was thus led by the superintending providence of God, to come into the royal presence with her petition at the very moment when the cast-off servant of Elisha was proclaiming the miracle, of which the Shunammite's own child had been the subject. Under such circumstances, who could refuse to do her justice, who could help befriending one whom heaven had already so befriended ?

Glad, no doubt, to be corroborated by such an unimpeachable witness, no sooner did the Shunammite enter the presence-chamber, than Gehazi cried aloud, "My lord, O king, this is the woman, and this is her son whom Elisha restored to life. And when the king asked the woman, she told him. So the king appointed unto her a certain officer, saying, Restore all that

was hers, and all the fruits of the field, since the day that she left the land, even until now.”

Can we refrain from dwelling for a few moments upon the peculiar providence of God as manifested in this simple history. Some may choose to call it a coincidence, and doubtless so it is, but when the Christian traces such coincidences throughout the whole of God’s revealed word, throughout every passage of his own life, in short, throughout the whole history of man, and when he sees, moreover, what incalculably great effects from trivial causes spring, he cannot but acknowledge that all such coincidences are the effect of an overruling Providence, directing every thing according to infinite wisdom and infinite power. To believe less than this, to acknowledge, as thousands do, the doctrine of a general Providence, but to deny that of a particular Providence, to see God’s hand in the fall of an empire, but to overlook it in the fall of a sparrow, appears as rational as to believe that the striking of a clock depends upon the hidden springs, and wheels, and works within, but that the movements of the minute-hand are left entirely to accident and chance.

No, brethren, be assured, that whatever view the self-called philosopher may take of these things, the true Christian believes, and delights to believe, that every event, be it great or small, (and who shall presume to call any event small, until he has beheld it by the microscopic light of eternity,) is directed or overruled by a Father’s superintending care, and ever-watchful love. It is difficult, perhaps impossible, to prove this to any but those who have habitually observed and recorded the providential events within their own experience, and yet there is one argument which appears so unanswerable, that we cannot refrain from adducing it. If these coincidences are purely fortuitous, if indeed any circumstances can happen by chance, how is it possible that there should be such a thing as a prediction of future events? Would not every prediction be liable to be falsified or frustrated by any of the ten thousand contin-

gencies which must occur between its utterance and its fulfilment. Surely, this alone, the single fact that all the prophecies of God have been accomplished to the very day, and to the very letter, is sufficient to demonstrate that what is casual to us is foreknown to God ; that although, as regards the secondary causes, they are often and obviously contingent, as regards the primary cause, they are pre-arranged and determined.* That although apparent chances abound, it is only our limited knowledge which occasions them. Take for example the very striking instance of the liberation of the Israelites by Pharaoh. God had predicted that they should tarry in the land of Egypt four hundred and thirty years, and at the end of that period, "even the self-same day," as the historian expresses it, "it came to pass, that all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt."† Pharaoh could not detain them one moment longer, because of God's prediction ; but of this he knew nothing, he would not keep them, because the death of all the first-born in Egypt made him as anxious to speed their departure, as he had been, four-and-twenty hours before, to prevent it. Nothing could appear to the Egyptians more entirely regulated by chance than the time of this exodus, and yet nothing was, in fact, better known to the faithful Israelites, than that the very day and hour of their departure had been foretold by God to Abraham. Paley has long since, with his usual perspicuity, illustrated, that the appearance of chance always bears an exact proportion to the ignorance of the observer. Thus he says, "The cast of a die as regularly follows the laws of motion, as the going of a watch ; yet because we can trace the operation of those laws through the works and movements of the watch, and cannot trace them in the shaking and throwing of the die, (though the laws be the same and prevail equally in both cases,) we call the turning up of the number of the die chance, the pointing of the index of the watch, machinery, order, or by some name which excludes chance." Yet the one is as entirely the effect of an established law as the other,

* See Acts iv. 27, 28.

† Exodus xii. 41.

and the result just as certain and undeviating. What we call chance, therefore, is simply the creation of our own ignorance. For again, "One man travelling to York, meets another man travelling to London. Their meeting is, as we term it, a mere chance, purely accidental:" and yet it "was nevertheless hypothetically necessary, (it could not be otherwise;) for if the two journeys were commenced at the time, pursued in the direction, and with the speed, in which and with which they were, in fact, begun and performed, the meeting could not be avoided." Thus it is that all which appears accident and chance to us, is regularity and design with God.

The great lessons we would draw from this view of the doctrine of a particular Providence, are, 1st, To learn to look less to secondary causes; and 2dly, To trust God, the Great First Cause, more cordially and more entirely.

1st. To look less to secondary causes.

If we indeed believe that our heavenly Father rules and overrules every event of our lives, are we not ashamed to be so continually distressing ourselves, by repiningly meditating upon what might have been the result, had the events which led to it, been different from what they were? Why are we for ever asking ourselves, What would have been the case, had such a course been taken, such a line of conduct been adopted; instead of calmly and contentedly, in every event of our lives, after having used the wisdom which God has given us, and committed the event to him, in earnest, faithful, persevering prayer, resting quietly upon his unbroken promise, "Commit thy way unto the Lord, and he shall bring it to pass."*

2d. The second lesson we would deduce, is to trust God more implicitly.

Believing not only that the great outlines of our lives are sketched by the hand of our heavenly Father, but that all the filling up is supplied from the same source, we shall view our position in the world, our station in society, our family blessings and family difficulties, our personal advantages and personal

* Psalm xxxvii. 5.

trials, our daily labours and daily comforts, the trifling events which try our tempers, or exercise our patience, or demonstrate our faith, or call forth our love, as so many little touches, all necessary to the completion of the picture, and each put in by the same Almighty hand.

How eminently comfortable is the state of mind thus superinduced, even during the darkest and least intelligible of the providences of God. With this belief once firmly established in your mind, you will feel convinced that all is right, and wise, and merciful in many a dispensation where you can, perhaps, at present see nothing of the intention or design. Attributing all to that God who cannot err, you will follow on in the track which his Providence lays down for you, faithfully and unrepiningly : knowing that it will assuredly issue in good, although when, and where, and how it will terminate, you know not. In this world we are seldom permitted to have more than a side view of a providence, but when we reach the end of our course, and can turn and gaze from the battlements of the celestial city, upon the path we have been traversing, we shall see its face, and be astonished to find, that what we have been following, through days of darkness and nights of despondency, as a stranger and an enemy, has been, indeed, one of our best and dearest friends.

How will the heart, now broken for sin and overwhelmed with sorrow, then receive "beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness."* How will the parent, who has grieved over the early departure of those most dear to him, wondering at what he now terms the "mysterious Providence" which has swept away the young and vigorous branches, while it has left untouched the scathed and feeble stem, then see that the heaviest blasts came laden with the largest portions of love, and were directed by a parent infinitely more tender than himself.

Could we but now possess one shadowy glimpse of all that we shall plainly see, and perfectly know hereafter, never, never

* Isaiah lxi. 3.

should we repine even at the darkest providence, or harbour one doubtful feeling of God's love, even in the most trying, most disappointing moment of our lives. If every earthly hope should fail us, if every friend should deceive us, if every dearly-loved and closely-cherished relative lay dead or dying at our feet, the language of our hearts, amidst this wreck of all life's promises, and all its prospects, and all its enjoyments, would still be, "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good," "Even so, Father; for so it seemeth good in thy sight."

LECTURE IX.

2 KINGS viii. 13.

"And Hazael said, But what, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?"

CONTINUING the history in which we are engaged, we find Elisha for the first time wandering beyond the limits of his native land, and a visitor in the country of the Syrians, his open and declared enemies.

Benhaddad, who was king of Syria at the time when Naaman, the captain of his host, was healed by Elisha, was still the reigning monarch; but he was at this period suffering under a great and serious illness. The coming of the prophet into his land was soon reported even in the sick chamber of the king, and he who had witnessed so remarkable an instance of Elisha's miraculous power in the recovery of Naaman, would naturally desire to consult him respecting his own.

Accordingly, we read, that no sooner was it told the king, "saying, the man of God is come hither," than he despatched Hazael, one of his chief officers, saying, "Take a present in thine hand, and go, meet the man of God, and inquire of the Lord by him, saying, Shall I recover of this disease?"

How different a message from that which true wisdom

would have dictated. How much more reasonable would it have been to have said, "Go, meet the man of God, and entreat him to heal me." Or, how wiser far, "Go, meet the man of God, and invite him to come and speak to me of the God of Israel." But, alas! Benhadad possessed not the inclination to be instructed, or the faith to be cured; he had simply the curiosity to know what would be the result of his malady. Strange, brethren, that it should be so strong a feature in the human mind, to desire to be informed of that which would profit us little if known, and to be indifferent to the only knowledge, which "is life eternal." "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" "Lord, are there few that be saved?" were questions from which even the apostles themselves could not refrain; how many at all times would like to indulge in similar inquiries; how few who desire to ask with the same sincerity and earnestness, "Lord, what shall I do to be saved?" And yet the most explicit answer to the former could only gratify a fruitless curiosity; while upon the latter, an eternity, yes, absolutely, an eternity, of weal or wo depends.

Benhadad's messenger departs with the deeply interesting, but singularly unprofitable inquiry of his master. For the historian informs us that Hazael went to meet him (Elisha), and took a present with him, even of every good thing of Damascus, forty camels' burden, and came and stood before him, and said, "Thy son Benhadad, king of Syria, hath sent me to thee, saying, Shall I recover of this disease?"

"Thy son Benhadad;" this was widely different language from that with which Elisha would have been greeted, had the bands which this same monarch sent, but a short time since, to arrest him, been successful in capturing the prophet. But Benhadad then was in all the vigour of health, in the full enjoyment of a crown, and with a prospect of its many years' continuance; a bed of sickness, a strong conviction of the utter insufficiency of worldly help to aid us, a near glimpse of eternity, are powerful correctives, mighty teachers. Brethren, if you would only think of the word of God's ministers, of the duties

of God's day, of the importance of God's commandments, and, above all, of the infinite value of God's dear Son, now, as most men think of them upon a sick bed, as, perhaps, you yourselves have there thought of them, the charm of this world would be broken, and, as a bird out of the hand of the fowler, by God's help your soul would be delivered from those snares by which it is now so fatally entangled. Cherish, I beseech you, most prayerfully, most earnestly, the feelings and resolutions which are implanted in a chamber of sickness. 'To forget or neglect them with returning health, is one of the most effectual, but, alas ! most common means, of sowing with thorns a dying pillow.

"And Elisha said unto him, Go, say unto him, Thou mayest certainly recover ; howbeit the Lord hath showed me that he shall surely die : " i. e. Benhadad may certainly be healed of the disease, in which there is nothing mortal, but God hath shown me that he shall die, though from a very different cause. "And he settled his countenance steadfastly, until he was ashamed ; and the man of God wept." Hazael settled his countenance in well-feigned regret at this prediction of his master's death, until he quailed beneath the steady gaze of the prophet, who evidently penetrated the flimsy veil of his hypocrisy, and made him ashamed of his detected guilt. "And the man of God wept ;" his eye was permitted to foresee the horrors impending upon his native country, and he could no longer refrain from tears. He wept to think of all that Hazael would perpetrate, and all that Israel would suffer. "And Hazael said, Why weepeth my lord ? And he answered, Because I know the evil that thou wilt do unto the children of Israel ; their strongholds wilt thou set on fire, and their young men wilt thou slay with the sword, and wilt dash their children, and rip up their women with child." He wept, therefore, because he foreknew the evil. What a melancholy thing, in almost every case, would be to us a knowledge of the future ! While we dwell in a world of sorrow, sin, and misery, how merciful that God has cast so thick a cloud over the coming hour. None

ever yet have been permitted to look beyond it, without dimming the prospect with their tears. Elisha wept over Israel's approaching sufferings; Jesus himself could not refrain; for, as he descended for the last time from the Mount of Olivet, his mind filled with the foreknowledge of the desolation of that glorious temple, and the destruction of its wretched worshippers, are we not expressly told, when he "beheld the city he wept over it."

Much cause, then, as we have to praise God for our knowledge, we have quite as urgent reason to bless him for our ignorance; for, in a world of suffering and of sin, how seldom, how very seldom would prescience and misery be disunited. How often would the mother's heart be filled with sorrow, and her eyes with tears, if, while she pressed her little one to her bosom, she could read in its peaceful and innocent countenance the trials, and the sufferings, and the wretchedness of the future man; how often, while the parent watches with joy the first tottering footsteps of the child, would his spirit sink within him, as that dark day passed in sad and sorrowful anticipation before his eyes, when the course of nature should be inverted, and he should follow to the sepulchre the remains of one whom he fondly hoped would be the comfort and solace of his own declining years, or, even worse than this, when he should live to see him a profligate and a reprobate, every early lesson forgotten, every good example cast aside; the fairest prospects of his youth for ever blighted, and his maturer age dishonoured by a course of reckless dissipation, and hastening the footsteps of those who gave him being, with sorrow to the grave. But why do we particularize? Where is the festive scene? where is the social meeting? where even is the domestic and family circle, upon which a knowledge of the future, (we speak only of the future which this world's horizon bounds and limits,) would not cast a deep and gloomy shadow? Let, then, our praises ascend to God, that all here below is to us unknown and uncertain; that if afflictions and distresses, if sorrows and disappointments be gathering around our path, there is no

darkening cloud to portend, no ominous howling of the elements to proclaim the coming tempest. But still louder and more heartfelt should be our thanksgivings, that this uncertainty has its boundary, this ignorance its limit, even though that boundary and that limit is the grave. The foreknowledge which would be our bane and curse as regards the events of time, is our highest joy, our strongest consolation, as respects those of eternity. Of the better and nobler things which God has prepared for all who love him, our heavenly Father suffers no ignorance to dull our minds, no uncertainty to mar our prospect; and we, poor children of the dust, whose eye can penetrate but little deeper into the events of the day which passes over us than the worm we tread upon, can see as angels see, and know with a certainty, that the highest archangel cannot emulate, events which shall befall us, and blessings which await us, when time itself has ceased to be. Yes, every true child of God is here a prophet, and has inherited the prescience of holy Job, and may say with the same assurance, and the same humble confidence, I also “know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; and though after my skin, worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God:” while he may, without presumption, add with the apostle, “Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day.” Here is indeed a foreknowledge, which, God be praised, is offered to all his children, and which consoles, and comforts, and elevates, while it enlightens and informs. Rest not until it is fully established in your mind, and occupies its proper place within your heart, for nothing short of this can raise you effectually, above “the changes and chances of this mortal life,” or make you tranquil, cheerful, and resigned, amidst the darkest vicissitudes that may await you.

Returning to the history, we find that no sooner had Elisha predicted to Hazael the enormities of which he should shortly be guilty, than with all the astonishment and indignation of

suspected innocence, Hazael exclaims, "But what, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing? And Elisha answered, The Lord hath showed me that thou shalt be king over Syria."

If we can believe, and there is certainly no reason to doubt, that the astonishment of Hazael at this prediction of his own atrocities was real, what a striking and profitable picture is it of the heart's astounding ignorance of itself! Am I a dog, that I should commit enormities, from the mere recital of which my spirit shrinks? Yet this was the man, who, within four-and-twenty hours, was guilty of an act quite equal in horror and in baseness, to any which had so greatly shocked him. Alas! brethren, how little do we know of our own hearts. And what is the consequence of this? Not only that men are continually falling victims to enemies whom they despise, and temptations which they disregard, but even yet more fatal for their souls' salvation, that they believe not the record which the unerring Word of God gives of them, and thus a deep conviction of sin, the very foundation of all true religion, is wanting in their hearts.

Is the truth of this assertion doubtful? Then bear with me while I repeat to you some of those humiliating statements which the Bible makes, not of any particular individual, or of any particular class, but of all classes, and of all individuals, and watch, while I enumerate them, how the recital affects yourselves. Take the well-known declaration of Jeremiah, xvii. 9, "The heart (speaking of every heart) is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." Or, of Ecclesiastes, ix. 3, "The heart of the sons of men (speaking of all the sons of men) is full of evil." Or, of Christ himself (Matt. xv. 19), "Out of the heart (again referring to every heart) proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies." Or, read seriously from the tenth to the nineteenth verse of the third chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. Now, I would ask you, candidly, What is the effect upon your own mind of such declarations as these? Is it not, in some

instances at least, very similar to that produced by Elisha upon the heart of Hazael? Are you not ready to ask, with equal surprise and indignation, I a murderer? I an adulterer? I a blasphemer? Am I a dog, that I should be suspected of atrocities such as these?

If the Bible be true, there is no enormity of which the unconverted, unregenerate man, may not be guilty, when temptation and opportunity are afforded him, and he is left to the uncontrolled domination of his own lusts and appetites. Does your experience contradict this? Have you never cherished any thoughts, have you never uttered any words, have you never committed any actions, of which you believed yourself incapable, and to every one of which, if predicted, you would have flung out as bold and confident a defiance as ever Peter did, when he declared, in utter ignorance of himself, "Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee in anywise." Nay, I would go farther than this, and ask, have you never resolved against a temptation, and even prayed against it, and yet been overcome by it, within a few hours after you have risen from your knees in perfect confidence that you had won the victory? Sure I am, that this is not merely the experience of an individual, but of the whole Church of God. If, then, you would be saved from evil, begin by praying that you may know what is evil, by understanding something of the corruption and depravity, the blindness and stubbornness of your own heart. No human being can be adequately aware of the extent of these, until enlightened by the Spirit of God to view them as God views them; not in the horrible maturity of perpetrated sin, as the daily chronicles of crime continually record them, but in the guilty motives, the unholy principles, the tainted thoughts, the impure imaginations from which they flow, and which are all as hateful to God, and as obnoxious to his wrath, as the more frightful, because more ostensible practices, to which, if unrestrained by his Spirit, they are ultimately, but surely, tending.

And may not the people of God find something here where--

with to profit them. Do you, Christian brethren, abstain from open sins? Are you unacquainted, practically at least, with gross enormities? Are you able, in some degree, to maintain a holy consistency, even in the more hidden walk and conversation of the Christian life? Then, who hath made you to differ from another, or what hast thou which thou hast not received? Great, indeed, will be the outpouring of your gratitude, and zealous and earnest its returns in the sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving, and holy obedience, when you consider what you are, and what you might have been; nay, what you were, and what you still would be, were it not for God's sovereign grace, to which alone you are indebted for your revival from a death in sin, to a life of holiness here, and of happiness in the eternity which is awaiting you.

But we must pursue this eventful story to its melancholy close

“So Hazael departed from Elisha, and came to his master, who said to him, What said Elisha to thee? And he answered, He told me that thou shouldest surely recover.” How utterly false and unjustifiable was this reply. Elisha had certainly said that Benhadad might recover, but he had never said that he should do so; he had distinctly declared that he should “surely die.” This falsehood, however, was only the first step in the downward career of guilt which the prophet had predicted, and which, as usual, darkened as it advanced.

No doubt the intention of Hazael was to blind Benhadad to his danger. For had he repeated truly the prophet's message, in all probability the sick man would have sent, not “forty camels' load of every good thing in Damascus,” but four hundred, if he might but have prevailed upon Elisha to do for him what he had done for Naaman. But Hazael had a very different project, and he must lull his victim into a false security, that he might encounter no difficulty, and lose no time in carrying it into effect.

How often does Satan, even at the present hour, practise precisely the same cunning and destructive stratagem. Is the

sick man terrified at the thought of approaching dissolution? Satan dreads lest this be followed by a heartfelt cry for mercy, a strong deep feeling of repentance, and like Hazael, he whispers in his ear, "Thou shalt surely recover;" this sickness is not unto death, be not alarmed, all will yet be well. Is the sinner partially awakened to a sense of his own dreadful situation? does he see the opening gulf which his sins have prepared for him? does he fear the justly awakened anger of God, which he has so long despised? the same false and deluding comforter is present to assuage his fears, and calm his apprehension, "Thou shalt not surely die, for God doth know" that thou art not so bad as thousands around thee; dismiss, therefore, thy fears, "eat, drink, and be merry."

Brethren, beware of the tempter, under what form soever he present himself, but fear him most of all when he counterfeits the Comforter, when, disguised as an angel of light, he would carry peace and consolation to your heart. It is, like Hazael, only that he may the easier stifle your cry for pardon, and smother the convictions which are perhaps for the first time struggling into life within your bosom. "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." Listen to him, and he will destroy you. Be not thus robbed of what may be to you your last, your only hope. Be not, I beseech you, thus fooled out of a soul's salvation. Let your earnest, heartfelt cries ascend to that mercy-seat where prayer was never yet in vain. Ask for that Spirit who can alone convert the heart. Plead powerfully with that Saviour who is the sinner's friend, whose blood cleanseth from all guilt, who "hath life in himself, and quickeneth whom he will." Nothing can keep you from him, unless you permit Satan to harden your heart, to postpone your repentance, to suffocate your prayers.

"And it came to pass on the morrow, that Hazael took a thick cloth, and dipped it in water, and spread it on Benhadad's face, so that he died."

Hazael's lie, therefore, was abundantly successful. Benhadad's fears were calmed, his apprehensions quieted, he no

longer desired to see the prophet, he no further doubted as to the result; his anxieties were succeeded by a peaceful and gentle repose; and his friend, the man who was indebted to him for all that he possessed of worldly rank and affluence, the man whom the king delighted to honour, and placed at his own right hand, converted, in one guilty moment, that sleep of peace into the sleep of death.

“And Hazael reigned in his stead,” is the brief and only comment of Holy writ. The benefactor dies a violent death, and the murderer becomes a prosperous and successful king.

Brethren, if it were only for cases such as these, and history is full, and human life, alas! even at the present hour, is not destitute of them, a disbelief in a future state, and in that Saviour who alone can make it, to us, a blessed and a happy one, would “dim the stars above our heads, and wither the very grass at our feet.”

But there is a day coming, when all these difficulties will be solved, and all these discrepancies reconciled; when the great white throne shall descend, and he who sits thereon shall “judge the world in righteousness,” every man according as his works have been. The murderer will then again stand face to face with his victim, whose very look will be his condemnation; the betrayer of innocence, the dishonest, the false, the profane, the Sabbath-breaker, and all and each will call upon the rocks to cover them, and the mountains to hide them from the face of Him who sitteth upon the throne. But on that day they shall call in vain; it will be a day of unerring judgment, of inexorable justice, of uncompromising retribution. Well might the prophet ask, “But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth?” Blessed be God, that His Word has not left us without an answer. For we may with humble confidence reply, Every sinner who has washed his robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Every contrite soul who has fled for refuge to the hope set before him in the Gospel; every believer who has laid hold, with firm and steady hand, upon the horns of the

altar, whence the blood of atonement freely flowed, and whence the offers of salvation are as freely sounded. — Saul, the murderer and blasphemer, did not sue in vain. The guiltiest among ourselves is not excluded; for with broken-hearted penitence and living faith, he may seek and find, even now, a pardon there. “Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.”

LECTURE X.

2 KINGS IX. 36.

“This is the word of the Lord, which he spake by his servant Elijah the Tishbite.”

AT the commencement of the course of lectures in which we are engaged, we were informed, at the period of the first calling of Elisha, of the objects for which he was chiefly set apart for the prophetical office. The words of the Almighty to the prophet Elijah were as follow, “Anoint Hazael to be king over Syria; and Jehu, the son of Nimshi, shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel, and Elisha the son of Shaphat, of Abel-meholah, shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room.” It was, then, as prophet in the room of Elijah, that Elisha was to fulfil those duties of the elder seer, which his translation into the presence of his Divine Master, precluded him from performing himself.

Of these high and important behests but one now remained unaccomplished, “Jehu, the son of Nimshi, shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel;” and as Elisha was fast sinking into the vale of years, and the fulness of time had doubtless arrived, it behoved him “to do the will of Him who sent him,” and to finish his work, that he might be ready for his own approaching summons into the kingdom and joy of his Lord.

Seven years had passed away since he had journeyed, with all the energy of youth, into Syria, to proclaim to Hazael that

the Lord had showed him that he should be king over Syria. These seven years had made great inroads upon Elisha's strength and activity, and he was no longer able in person to undertake the journey to Ramoth-gilead, but remaining quietly in his distant home, perhaps in his prophet's chamber on the wall, deputed a younger and more able representative to achieve the high and important enterprise. Deeply trying must it have been to the prophet thus to transact by the hands and mouth of another, what he would doubtless far more willingly have performed in his own person, and with his own lips ; how trying, none can tell, but those who are similarly prevented from personally fulfilling the duties of their respective stations, be they what they may. But, brethren, when those duties are, in an especial manner, duties due to God, when those services are peculiarly to be wrought for him, it is difficult to express the feelings of heartfelt sorrow and regret with which we resign them into other, even though we are persuaded, into better hands than our own. It is painful, deeply painful, for the Christian, and especially for the Christian minister, to feel how short the time is in which, under the happiest circumstances, he can *work* for God ! True, he hopes to spend an eternity in His presence, a sabbath of joy, and rest, and praise ; but he knows not, he cannot know, but that when his threescore years and ten have terminated—and how much shorter is the period allotted to most—his work-days will be over ; never again shall he enjoy the privilege of labouring for God, and of extending his kingdom ; never again shall he find enemies, whom love may soften ; ignorant, whom instruction may teach ; poor, whom benevolence may aid ; brethren, whom encouragement may comfort ; broken and contrite hearts, which, in the name and by the help of his God, he may bind up. These are privileges which the holiest can scarcely resign without a sigh, for they are services in which an angel might delight, and the highest archangel desire to participate. Lose not then the lesson so obviously taught by these reflections : Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might ; for there is no

work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave, whither thou goest.”*

“And Elisha the prophet called one of the children of the prophets, and said unto him, Gird up thy loins, and take this box of oil in thine hand, and go to Ramoth-gilead : and when thou comest thither, look out there Jehu the son of Jehoshaphat the son of Nimshi, and go in, and make him arise up from among his brethren, and carry him into an inner chamber ; then take the box of oil, and pour it on his head, and say, Thus saith the Lord, I have anointed thee king of Israel.”

There is something very impressive in the thought of this consecrated prophet of the Most High, living in utter obscurity, indebted perhaps to the charity of a holy woman for a roof to shelter him from the inclemency of the weather, and yet thus disposing of crowns and kingdoms, as if he were among the highest potentates of the earth.

So does it please the Almighty sometimes openly and unanswerably to demonstrate the truth of his own declaration, “By me kings reign and princes decree justice.”

But, brethren, does this astonish you ? You shall see greater things than these. For thus, at all times, “God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise ; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty ; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen ; yea, and things which are not, to bring to naught things that are ; that no flesh should glory in his presence.” The same Almighty potentate, who in the olden dispensation thus distributed temporal crowns and worldly glories by the hands of the most inconsiderable of the souls of men, to show that the Lord alone ruleth in the kingdoms of the earth ; still continues, even at the present moment, to offer eternal crowns and never-dying glories, through the same weak and feeble instruments, to prove that He alone ruleth in the kingdom of heaven. “We have this treasure in earthen vessels,” writes the Apostle, “that the excellency

* Eccl. ix. 10.

of the power may be of God, and not of us." The feeblest and least honoured among the servants of God, he who dwelling in an obscurity from which he desires not to emerge, utterly unknown to the great, and wealthy, and powerful of the earth, may be, and often is, the blessed instrument of assisting in accomplishing the number of God's elect, and in filling up the mansions of the heavenly house, and in preparing the heirs of immortality for crowns of glory, when those of earth shall have faded for ever from our view. But, brethren, did Jehu express his gratitude to the prophet for his earthly crown? Will you thank that servant for your heavenly inheritance? I trow not. For God, and God alone, shall be exalted in that day. You deprive yourselves of the benefit of the lesson, you subvert the very principle upon which the Almighty acts, if you, even for a moment, lose sight of this great scriptural truth, or unduly exalt the dignity of the messenger.

I do not forget that St. Paul says, "Inasmuch as I am the Apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office."* But neither can I help recollecting that the same Apostle elsewhere very significantly asks, "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase." The Almighty selects the lowest and the feeblest instruments, purposely, that it may be utterly impossible to measure the apparent causes by the real effects. The Church, the sacraments, the ministry, what are they all, but in themselves weak and powerless means, and yet absolutely omnipotent, when in the hands of an Almighty God, for the regeneration of a world? Bear this in mind, and you cannot but feel extremely jealous of the great and laborious effort making, at the present day, unduly to magnify these means, and to exalt these instruments. However gratifying it may be to natural pride, or to spiritual pride, and in all ages of the Church it has proved itself to be

* Rom. xi. 13.

so, thus to magnify the sacerdotal office, I believe it will be found in the end to injure even the cause which it is expected to subserve, to debase the Church itself, by endeavouring unduly to elevate it, and most assuredly not to promote the honour and glory of God. For in proportion as men exalt the outward and visible means, however holy those means may be, they are, perhaps involuntarily, but surely, led to depress the inward and spiritual grace. Thus it may be incontestably proved from the history of Romanism, that the natural course is this: by unscripturally exalting sacraments, we lower the Lord of the sacraments; by exalting authoritative and traditional exposition of God's word, we diminish men's estimation of that blessed word itself; we may begin, as the Romish Church began, by over-estimating the servant, and we shall end, as she has ended, by comparatively overlooking the Master, the only mediator, overshadowed and lost amid a crowd of saintly coadjutors, until at length religion becomes a mere code of forms and ordinances, excluding all close and spiritual intercourse with the Father of our spirits, all holy fellowship and communion with the ever-blessed Comforter, and all personal and sensible union with the only-begotten Son.*

* I am glad to be able to corroborate this view of the effect of the newly-revived opinions, as developed by the writers of the "Tracts for the Times," &c., by the following valuable extract from the last Charge of the Lord Bishop of Chester:—"Many subjects present themselves, towards which I might be tempted to direct your thoughts. One more especially concerns the Church at present, because it is daily assuming a more serious and alarming aspect, and threatens a revival of the worst evils of the Romish system. Under the specious pretence of deference to antiquity, and respect for primitive models, the foundations of our Protestant Church are undermined by men who dwell within her walls, and those who sit in the Reformer's seat are traducing the Reformation. It is again becoming matter of question whether the Bible is sufficient to make man wise unto salvation; the main article of our national confession, justification by faith, is both openly and covertly assailed; and the stewards of the mysteries of God are instructed to reserve the truths which they have been ordained to dispense, and to hide under a bushel those doctrines which the apostles were commanded to preach to every creature."—*Bishop of Chester's Charge*, 1838, p. 2.

I would not, God forbid that I should, by these remarks, lead you to disparage your Church, your sacraments, your ministers, neither did our Lord teach you to disregard the claims of the relative duties, when He hesitated not to say, "If any man hate not his father and mother, he cannot be my disciple;" but I would, by God's help, lead you to view the holiest of these outworks of religion but as outworks still, and to use them all only as approaches to the shechinah which for ever shines within; that you may there find in close and intimate communion with God, that strength and wisdom for this world's calls upon you, and that purity of heart, and that oneness with the Lord Jesus Christ and resemblance to himself, which shall be your surest safeguard here, your highest joy and greatest blessedness when you enter into the kingdom of your Father.

Proceeding with the history, we find that the young prophet, the representative of Elisha, tarried not a moment in fulfilling the important commission with which he was charged. He journeyed at once to Ramoth-gilead, and finding Jehu seated in the midst of his officers, he called him forth into an inner chamber, and pouring the oil upon his head, said unto him, "Thus saith the Lord, I have anointed thee king over the people of the Lord, even over Israel;" adding, that the great purpose for which he was thus called to the throne of his master was, that he might execute the justice of the Lord upon the guilty family of Ahab.

And now, brethren, I must call your attention to one of the most remarkable, and most accurately fulfilled predictions, ever spoken by the mouth of the Lord. God had said, by the word of Elijah the prophet, to Ahab, king of Israel, on the day when he met him walking in the vineyard of Naboth, which he had procured by perjury and bloodshed, "In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth, shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine,"* and he added afterwards in the hearing of Jehu, "And I will requite thee in this plat,"† in the very

* 1 Kings xxi. 19.

† 2 Kings ix. 26.

vineyard which he had coveted, and taken possession of Ahab had, however, humbled himself before the threatenings of God, and in consequence, God had said, "In his son's days will I bring the evil upon his house." It was now about to be shown that God had not spoken in vain.

Jehoram, the son of Ahab, the king of Israel, having been wounded in a contest with Hazael, king of Syria, was journeying for a short time in Jezreel, the very town at the outskirts of which lay the fatal vineyard, the plat of ground which God had declared, should witness Ahab's punishment, as it had aforetime beheld his iniquity and wrong. No sooner, then, had the trumpets sounded in Ramoth-gilead, and the voice of the heralds proclaimed, "Jehu is king," than we are informed that the first words he uttered were, "If it be your minds, then let none escape out of the city, to go to tell it in Jezreel." It was not enough that he should overcome Jehoram, and put him to death, but it must be there, in the very spot, disgraced by the crimes of his family, and pre-doomed of God. "So Jehu rode in a chariot, and went to Jezreel. And there stood a watchman on the tower in Jezreel, and he spied the company of Jehu as he came, and said, I see a company. And Joram said, Take an horseman, and send to meet them, and let him say, Is it peace? So there went one to meet him, and said, 'Thus saith the king, Is it peace? And Jehu said, What hast thou to do with peace? turn thee behind me. And the watchman told, saying, The messenger came to them, but he cometh not again.'" Surely this was warning sufficient, and more than sufficient, for Jehoram to have fled from the fate that awaited him; but it was a warning thrown away. Again he sent another messenger, and again he saw from the still distant watch-tower, that he returned no more. Yet the second warning passed unheeded by. Then the watchman, every moment bringing the advancing party nearer to the walls, exclaimed, "The driving is like the driving of Jehu the son of Nimshi; for he driveth furiously." This third warning also was disregarded.

The judicially blinded monarch ordered his chariot to be made ready, but instead of flying in the opposite direction, as all wisdom and all prudence dictated, he actually goes to meet Jehu, and thus rushes upon his predicted fate. And where did he meet him? In what spot did they encounter? He "met him," says the inspired historian, "in the portion of Naboth the Jezreelite." Had he proceeded at once toward him, without thus sending messenger after messenger, he would have met him far beyond that portion: had he any longer delayed, he would, like Jezebel, have been found within the city; but he started, however unconsciously, however to him accidentally, at the very moment that should bring him to the spot which the Lord had long since appointed for his place of execution.

The very instant that he beheld Jehu, "he turned his hands and fled," but it was then too late. "And Jehu drew a bow with his full strength, and smote Jehoram between his arms; and the arrow went out at his heart, and he sunk down in his chariot. Then said Jehu to Bidkar his captain, Take up and cast him in the portion of the field of Naboth the Jezreelite; for remember how that, when I and thou rode together after Ahab his father, the Lord laid this burden upon him: Surely I have seen yesterday the blood of Naboth, and the blood of his sons, saith the Lord; and I will requite thee in this plat, saith the Lord. Now, therefore, take and cast him into the plat of ground, according to the word of the Lord."

And as it happened to Jehoram, so also it happened to his mother Jezebel. It appears that she usually resided in Samaria, but she also had come down to Jezreel, probably to attend upon her wounded son. Both, therefore, were providentially in the place appointed. Now it had been foretold as plainly, that Jezebel should die in the town, as that Jehoram should be destroyed in the vineyard; for God had distinctly said, "The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall," or, in the ditch "of Jezreel." She, therefore, equally unconsciously, and we may add, equally against all probability, promoted its fulfilment.

She remained in the watch-tower when her son left it, but she remained only to suffer a still more degrading fate. At the command of Jehu, she was thrown from the window into the ditch which ran round the city, and when a few hours after, they went, by his orders, to bury her, he himself therefore, apparently forgetful of the very prophecy he was fulfilling, "they found no more of her than the skull, and the feet, and the palms of her hands. Wherefore they came again and told him." Now, observe how unconsciously is man the instrument in fulfilling the word of the Lord. And he said, (recollecting the prediction only by its accomplishment,) "This is the word of the Lord, which he spake by his servant Elijah the Tishbite, saying, In the portion of Jezreel shall dogs eat the flesh of Jezebel. And the carcase of Jezebel shall be as dung upon the face of the field in the portion of Jezreel; so that they shall not say (or not be able to say), This is Jezebel."

Such is the close of this eventful story. So accurately, so literally, were both these predictions fulfilled.

Let us inquire, brethren, what is the great lesson to be derived from them? Is it not this, that whenever, be the subject what it may, we can with truth declare, "This is the word of the Lord which he spake," that word is absolutely certain of accomplishment, though all the powers of earth or hell conspire against it.

There is one class of persons, to be found probably in all congregations, although, we trust, forming a very small minority in our own, upon whom we could desire especially to impress this great and powerfully influential truth; they who are living in disregard of the threatenings of the Most High.

Observe, I entreat you, observe carefully the incident before you. Years had passed away between the threatening and its fulfilment; yet nothing that had intervened, could avail to traverse the will of God, or disarrange its most complete and literal accomplishment. And can you doubt but that God, who, if we may so express it, so studiously, so carefully provided for the fulfilment of his own word, as regarded these threaten-

ings and these individuals, will not as certainly insure the accomplishment of every threatening and against every individual? I know not a more fearful or a more painful thought, than the inevitable certainty of God's predicted judgments. If the impenitent sinner could only read the records of days gone by; if the man who has never yet fled to the Rock that is higher than we, and sought pardon from an offended God through the blood of Jesus, would only observe the manner in which every threatened evil that God has spoken has infallibly come to pass, he would not be able to rest in his bed this night, until he had sought and found a Saviour. But, perhaps, some are still sheltering themselves under the idea that there is no express malediction, at least no personal denunciation, as regards themselves, and that these, therefore, are not legitimate deductions from the subject before us. Surely, to such persons we may apply our Lord's words and say, "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God." For what can be more strictly personal to ourselves, than such declarations as these: "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God." It is true no names are mentioned here, but characters are names; and may this not be as personal to some among us, as if our names were as plainly inscribed as those of Jehoram or Jezebel? The apostle, while addressing the fearful catalogue to his converts, adds plainly and unhesitatingly, "And such were some of you." It is not for uninspired man to imitate this example. But we may, without any breach of Christian charity, say, And such may be some of us. At any rate, we dare not say, And such are none of us. If there be, then, but one individual who finds himself, i. e. his own character or habits, among those enumerated, let him lay well to heart the incident we have this morning been considering. We would say to him, not harshly, but affectionately, in denouncing these sinners, God has by your

own confession denounced you. And God never yet uttered a denunciation that was not, or shall not be, most literally fulfilled. It is then certain, that not an individual whose character is there portrayed can inherit the kingdom of God, for "this threatening is the word of the Lord, which he spake by his servant" Paul the apostle.

Again, God has said by the mouth of the same servant, "He that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption," and "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha,"—accursed before Him at his coming. Are we all clear from these maledictions? Is no one among us "sowing to the flesh," living only for the gratification of the passing hour, cherishing the flesh, instead of crucifying it, with its sinful affections and lusts? so absorbed in obtaining or enjoying the good things of this present evil world, that God and His glory, Christ and his kingdom, our souls and their eternity, are forgotten, or uninfluential themes? Or, do we all so love, or desire to love, the Lord Jesus Christ, that not one among us falls under this most solemn imprecation?

Brethren, these are no trifling inquiries, when you see, as you have this day seen, the certain punishment of the guilty, that no single threatening which God has ever directed his servant to utter, can fall harmless to the ground. And yet God leaves not the culprit without warnings; thrice he warned Jehoram, though without effect. He warned the old world by the preaching of Noah; he warned the sons-in-law of Lot by the words of their father. He warned the impenitent Jews by the mouth of his beloved Son; and has He never warned or threatened you? Have you never been laid upon a bed of sickness? That was a warning. Have you never followed to the grave a beloved wife, or husband, or parent, or child? That was a warning. Has the Holy Spirit never carried to your heart, it may be but for a passing moment, some striking text, or some solemn discourse? Then also was that a warning. If you could say, which you doubtless cannot, that you never

were on any previous occasion in your whole life, warned by God, you have been warned to-day, you are warning now.

Would to God that he might in mercy go further still than this, that He might not only warn, but enforce His warning ; not only threaten, but this day induce you to believe His threatening ; not only show you the terrors of His wrath, but this moment reveal to you the unbounded mercies of his love ; opening to every threatened sinner a way to escape, and vouchsafing to every soul an interest in the cleansing blood and justifying righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. And may we not hope that He will do so ? For, are the threatenings of the Almighty certain, and can His promises be uncertain ? Shall nothing prevent the fulfilment of the former, and shall any thing intervene to hinder the accomplishment of the latter ? No ; in the language of an apostle, “ As God is true * * * all the promises of God in him (Christ Jesus) are yea, and in him, Amen : ” fixed, unchangeably, unalterably, and for ever. And one of those blessed promises is, “ My word shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that whereto I send it.” “ The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin.” What would you seek, what would you desire, which is not included here ? ‘ The child’s first sin in infancy, the hoary sinner’s last crime in decrepid age, all are within the range of the promise, all come within the scope of the blessed declaration. None need doubt, none need hesitate ; the very assurance which it has been the object of this discourse to establish, as regards the threatenings of God, applies with tenfold force, yea, with ten thousandfold force to his promises, “ Almighty to destroy, Almightyest to save.” If there be one convinced and convicted sinner before God this day, one who is conscious of practices such as we have enumerated, one who is destitute of that knowledge and that love to the Saviour, of which we have spoken, and who is willing now, in the day of God’s power, to cry for mercy, to ask for God’s Holy Spirit, that he may be enabled to seek in heartfelt penitence and faith the Saviour of the world ; to him we say, and we say it at God’s command and

in God's own words, "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool;" though you have hitherto been an alien and an outcast, come thus to the blood of Christ, forsaking sin, and you shall be received this hour as a welcomed penitent, a pardoned sinner, an acknowledged and adopted son. For this also is among the never-broken promises of our God, "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out."

LECTURE XI.

2 KINGS XIII. 14.

"Now Elisha was fallen sick of his sickness whereof he died, and Joash the king of Israel came down unto him, and wept over his face, and said, O my father, my father! the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof."

WE this day arrive at the close of the eventful history which it has been my endeavour plainly and simply to bring before you. I trust, by the aid of the good Spirit of our God, that the effort has not been utterly in vain; but that some features in the portraiture of so holy a man of God may have made that deep and abiding impression upon our hearts, which was intended by the historian who was commanded to record them.

The last scene of the prophet's life is very briefly narrated by the inspired penman; and such is usually the case in the book of God; with the exceptions of Jacob, Joseph, and David, there is scarcely an example in which any particulars of a death-bed are recorded; there are more than twenty instances in each of which the solemn event is despatched in the original in a single word. and "he died;" as if to teach us that it is comparatively of small importance in what manner men die. The question is, How have they lived? It is not, what are the frames and feelings, often greatly deceptive, which manifest themselves during the last few painful, and it may be, almost

delirious hours of mortal sickness, that will, generally speaking, avail any of us; the serious consideration is, what is the state of our hearts, what are the words of our mouths, the actions of our lives, while health and strength are our own, and the fear of death is distant?

If men would only look at these important features now, with the feelings with which they will one day view them, if they would only examine themselves now, with half the anxiety, the self-suspicion, the misgivings, with which they will scrutinize their conduct, when the last great enemy approaches, and the veil now hanging between them and the eternal world is slowly drawing up; how different would be the apprehension of our hearers. How much more agreeable the office of the preacher. Instead of having frequently to remind you of unpleasant truths, of awful threatenings, of dark forebodings, of a doubtful or a dreary eternity, we should only be, as the apostles were to many among their converts, “ministers by whom ye believed,” and “helpers of your joy.” Our far more pleasing duty would then be to comfort God’s people, to cry aloud, “Lift up your hearts;” to remind you of your privileges; to impress upon you your blessedness; to endeavour to render you more and more meet for the high, and holy, and glorious inheritance awaiting you. But we shall return to this subject at a later period of our discourse.

The only particular of the last hours of Elisha which the historian has bequeathed to us, is the visit paid him by the monarch of the country in which he dwelt. “Now Elisha,” says the Word of God, “was fallen sick of his sickness whereof he died. And Joash the king of Israel came down unto him, and wept over his face, and said, O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof.”

There is something in the departure of the good and wise, which often powerfully affects the feelings, and calls forth the sympathies even of the thoughtless and indifferent. No very great regard may have been paid to their instructions, no very fervent love felt for their persons, no particular predilection

entertained for their society, and yet, when we are assured, that the voice to which we have listened, at least with respect, perhaps occasionally with deep and thrilling interest, is for ever silenced ; that the eye which may possibly have beamed upon us with kindness, or even frowned upon us with anxiety, is closed in darkness ; that the form which we have been, from our earliest years, accustomed to behold with respect, it may be with affection and love, is about to be committed to its narrow dwelling-place ; if there be a latent feeling, either of gratitude or remorse, existing within the breast, such a state of things will often call it forth into sincere and irrepressible emotion. While many of the most thoughtless are, at least for the moment, struck with regret that they have lost for ever a counsellor by whom they might have profited ; a guide, whom they might have followed ; a friend, whom they might, with essential benefit to their own best interests, have respected and loved.

It is necessary to recall the existence of such feelings to our minds, to account for the, otherwise, unintelligible conduct of Joash. He had reigned nearly sixteen years over Israel, carelessly and wickedly, and never, that we are informed, had paid a single visit to the aged prophet, or asked his counsel, or followed his advice ; while Elisha, past the period usually allotted to man, and now entering his ninetieth year, appears to have spent the close of his life in great neglect and obscurity. The young king hears, however, that the prophet is dying ; and probably very much under the influence of those natural and regretful feelings which we have attempted to describe, hastens at once to the sick man's chamber, and there, in all the agony of wo, increased by the sense of his past remissness and neglect, pours forth his tears, and bursts into the passionate lamentation, " O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof," expressing himself in the very words with which Elisha had bewailed the departure of Elijah.

Brethren, it is easy thus to repay instruction unheeded, and counsels valued only when too late, by a few violent exclama-

tions of regard uttered at a death-bed, or a few worthless tears dropped upon the sepulchre ; but these will not obey the forgotten injunctions, or redeem the misspent time, or recall the neglected opportunity. The aged seer might, with perfect truth and propriety, have replied to the youthful monarch, as the Almighty is represented by the prophet Malachi to have answered disobedient Israel, “ A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master : if then I be a father, where is mine honour ? and if I be a master, where is my fear ? ” It is in vain now to profess to lament for a father whom you have never honoured, to mourn for a master whom you have never feared.

My younger brethren, whose hearts have not yet been chilled by the atmosphere of a cold and unfeeling world, to you I would most solemnly and most affectionately apply this example. You will one day, in all human probability, be called to follow to the grave, those parents and advisers who are now the kind and affectionate guides of your youth, and your best and wisest counsellors. That day must be, to every feeling heart, a bitter day ; increase not its bitterness, add not to its pangs, by the recollection of advice carelessly disregarded, or admonitions scornfully cast aside. The prevailing habits of the age in which we live, are opposed to all obedience ; its popular opinions would induce you to consider it but a light and trivial matter, to neglect what a minister of God may say, or a parent may urgently and affectionately require of you ; but be assured, that when their heads are laid in the dust, and their voices silenced in the grave, deep and painful will be your recollection of every ungrateful return which you have thus made for the affectionate protection of your childhood, and the love so largely lavished on the days of boyhood and youth. It will be then vain to cry, “ My father, my father,” even though it be amid tears of the sincerest lamentation ; the very name will but remind you, that you have despised the obligations which that relationship implies ; that in disobeying him who is gone, you have disobeyed God, who has commanded honour to be joined to affection, obedience to be united with love, from the child to

its parents, as distinctly as to the Almighty himself; and who will never recognize among his children, one who scornfully contemns these, God's own representatives upon earth. The habits and sentiments of the age may vary, but God's word is immutable, and varies not; and the day is not far distant, when its truth will be established before assembled worlds; "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my word shall not pass away."

Returning once more to Elisha's dying chamber, we find that the time was quickly passing by, the last sands were falling from the prophet's glass, and he kindly accepts the penitential expressions of Joash, although he knew, alas! too well that he who uttered them, "did," so the Word of God assures us, "that which was evil in the sight of the Lord; for he departed not from all the sins of Jereboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin." But God will be no man's debtor: Ahab humbled himself, although he forsook not his iniquity, and the Almighty postponed his judgment, although we have no reason to believe that He converted his heart. So Joash honours the closing hours of God's prophet, and the Almighty, in return, permits that prophet to be the vehicle to him of temporal benefit. Thus we invariably find it; the smallest movement for good, is recognized and approved of, and often rewarded by the Almighty; and many are the instances in the Old Testament, in which temporal blessings follow thus immediately upon temporary obedience. How striking a proof of this, do we find in the example at present before us. No sooner had the king expressed himself as we have already seen, than the prophet said unto him, "Take bow and arrows. And he said to the king of Israel, Put thine hand upon the bow. And he put his hand upon it: and Elisha put his hands upon the king's hands. And he said, Open the window eastward. And he opened it. Then Elisha said, Shoot. And he shot. And he said, The arrow of the Lord's deliverance from Syria: for thou shalt smite the Syrians in Aphek, till thou have consumed them."

How touching a picture, and how significant a symbol!

The dying prophet rises up in his bed to lay his withered hand upon that of the young and powerful king; without this interposition of Elisha, Joash would have drawn the bow in vain; strong as is the monarch, he must learn that the blessing is simply and entirely from God; that the prophet's nerveless hand laid upon his, shall impart a strength, and secure a triumph, which all the vigour of all the bowmen of Israel could not have purchased; so truly had he said, "The chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof." God's holiest servants are a nation's best and strongest defenders. May we never for a moment forget, brethren, this important truth, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts." The feeble hand of the prophet, the faintest prayers of God's people, will oftentimes nerve the strongest arm, and give increased effect to the most powerful resolutions. The dying prophet's last petitions obtain a victory for his native country, when its chariots and horsemen would have been useless; and Joash reaps a large reward for his expressions of sympathy, and tears of kindness.

Still God will make the measure of the king's faith, the measure also of his promised successes. Joash has honoured God in the person of his prophet, and he shall succeed against his enemies; but the degree of success shall be regulated by the warmth of his zeal, the strength of his faith, the energy of his perseverance.

Observe how the prophet tries them. "He said, Take the arrows: and he took them. And he said unto the king of Israel, Smite upon the ground: and he smote thrice, and stayed. And the man of God was wroth with him, and said, 'Thou shouldest have smitten five or six times, then hadst thou smitten Syria till thou hadst consumed it: whereas now thou shalt smite Syria but thrice.'" What could be the reason that Joash, perfectly understanding, as he must have done, the significant symbol, anxious as he ought to have been to have triumphed over the enemies of his country, and of his throne, acted thus coldly and listlessly, and excited so evidently the

anger, or rather the grief, of Elisha? Brethren, there can be no question, that the cause of it, however undeveloped, even to his own heart, such a motive might be, was simply unbelief; unbelief, manifesting itself, as it invariably does, in coldness, listlessness, and indifference. Joash did not really and thoroughly believe that his triumphs over Syria should be limited by the strokes of his arrows upon the ground. Think you that if he had, he would thus carelessly have smitten, or thus speedily have ceased to smite? No; it is perfectly evident, that there was a secret root of unbelief existing in his heart; not, indeed, strong enough to cause him absolutely to disobey the prophet's command, and yet too strong to permit him fully to reap its intended benefit.

Behold in this simple narrative, a key to the small achievements in spiritual things, the stunted growth, the slow advancement in the Christian life and Christian experience of many among ourselves. Our prayers are formal, our efforts are languid, our conflicts with our spiritual enemies, few, and weak, and aimless; and why is this? Because we do not fully believe in those great and good things which God has promised; therefore we neither long after them ardently, nor press towards them earnestly, nor strive for them unceasingly. We overcome, it may be, a few evil habits, we conquer a few besetting sins, we advance a little way against our spiritual foes, and then we rest contented with our victories, and sit down quietly with the feeling of the man in the Gospel, "Soul, take thine ease," and never attempt with all our heart, and mind, and strength, to press onward, and attain to the stature of the fulness of Christ.

How many are there, of whom this is strictly and literally true, so that it might fairly be said of them, as of Joash, they have smitten "thrice and stayed." Spiritual indolence is their ruin. They contend just enough with the powers of darkness to quiet their own consciences, and then "stay;" a melancholy close to a most hopeful beginning! "Their goodness," as the prophet expresses it, "is as the morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away."

Brethren, ask yourselves, individually, is it so with me? Have I rested in a slight improvement instead of seeking the renewal of the whole man? Have I been satisfied with a very limited advancement in Christian sanctification; conscious that my place in the school of Christ is a very low one, and yet willing to remain there; have I, in fact, "stayed;" settled down upon the lees, when I ought to have been striving, struggling, or even "agonizing?" for our Lord did not think that too strong an expression, to represent the degree of zeal and energy with which we ought to "strive to enter in at the strait gate," and to attain to some blessed meetness for His eternal kingdom.

If there are any who feel that this is too true a representation of their present condition, we earnestly call upon them to rouse themselves from this state of listless inactivity; no longer to be content with past victories or present attainments; no longer to be satisfied with saying, I trust I am in Christ Jesus, and therefore I am safe; but to strive zealously for the filling up of every Christian grace, the performance of every high and holy duty, that so not only an entrance, but as the apostle expresses it, "an entrance may be ministered unto them ABUNDANTLY into the kingdom and joy of our Lord." It is true that to be a mere doorkeeper in the house of our God, would infinitely outweigh the pains and penalties of a thousand lives of labour and of self-denial, but God has freely offered us the highest glories, and the richest enjoyments, and God is most honoured when we the most anxiously and largely seek them. "Open thy mouth wide," are His own words, "and I will fill it." This spiritual listlessness and indolence are, we believe, among the most crying sins of our time; there are thousands who are greatly improved by religion, but where are the individuals who are with all their heart, and soul, and strength, "following the Lord fully," clinging closely to Him, desiring to rest in nothing short of a full, complete, and entire resemblance to Him? May God of His great mercy add a thousand-fold to their number, may He teach us all to know experimentally, and to exhibit practically, something at least of the feelings of

one, who was as certainly a regenerated and converted Christian as any whom I now address, and yet who hesitated not to say, "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended;" I think nothing at present done; "but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

All that remains to us of the history of him of whom we have been speaking, is, as we noticed at the commencement of this discourse, very briefly narrated by the inspired historian, "And Elisha died, and they buried him." This is all that the Spirit of God has to record of the end of one of the most unblemished characters to be met with in the volume of inspiration! He died, and they buried him! Of his last hours all is silence; it is enough that he exchanges his cottage of clay for a palace of marble; that he goes from serving God here, to dwelling with him for ever in heaven. Of the manner of this exchange, of the mode of departure, not a word is bequeathed to us. He had indeed inherited a double portion of Elijah's spirit, but he did not inherit the chariot of fire which carried him upward to the skies. No, "Elisha died;" the longest and the holiest life knows no other conclusion. God's dearest servants are not exempt from this, the common lot of all mortality; God's own Son desired not to escape it; it awaits yourselves, it awaits us all. This is a mere truism. No one doubts it; but who regards it? who lives as if he gave it credit? who acts, as if each breath he drew might be the last?

Would to God, brethren, we could but daily, hourly realize that we are DYING creatures. How would it plead with us to redeem the time? How would it almost compel us to live less unto the world, and more to God. How would it drive us to the Rock that is higher than we, and force upon us some feelings of gratitude to Him, whose dying love has purchased an entrance into an eternity of glory. But we dislike the subject, and we banish it. It is a forbidden topic, and in ordinary society, its very mention excites astonishment, puts a stop to

the most lively conversation, and saddens, immediately, the most cheerful countenance. And yet it ought not so to be, if our faith were steadfast, and our hopes clear, and our lives consistent; there is little, comparatively speaking, of real painfulness in this solemn subject. It is painful, we allow, to think of broken ties, and earthly relationships rent asunder, and friendships buried in the cold and silent grave; but a Christian knows of something more than these. And is it painful to think of the bright land which lies beyond it, and into which a single step will carry us? Is it painful to think of a country where all is holiness and peace, and where sin and sorrow are alike unknown? where we have already a Father, a Brother, a Comforter, and many, many friends? Surely this is not painful; this ought not to be, to any one among us, a subject of unmingled dissatisfaction, nay rather, should it not be one of calm and quiet confidence, if not of subdued and holy triumph? Such, dear brethren, it has ever been and will ever be, if only we are reconciled to God through Jesus Christ our Lord, cleansed by his blood, sanctified by his Spirit, renewed into his image. "It is appointed to men once to die," there is no escaping it; but then, thank God, it is but once. Over every child in Christ's redeemed and pardoned family, "the second death hath no power."* Once pass the narrow valley, and it shall open into a wide expanse of never-ending glory.

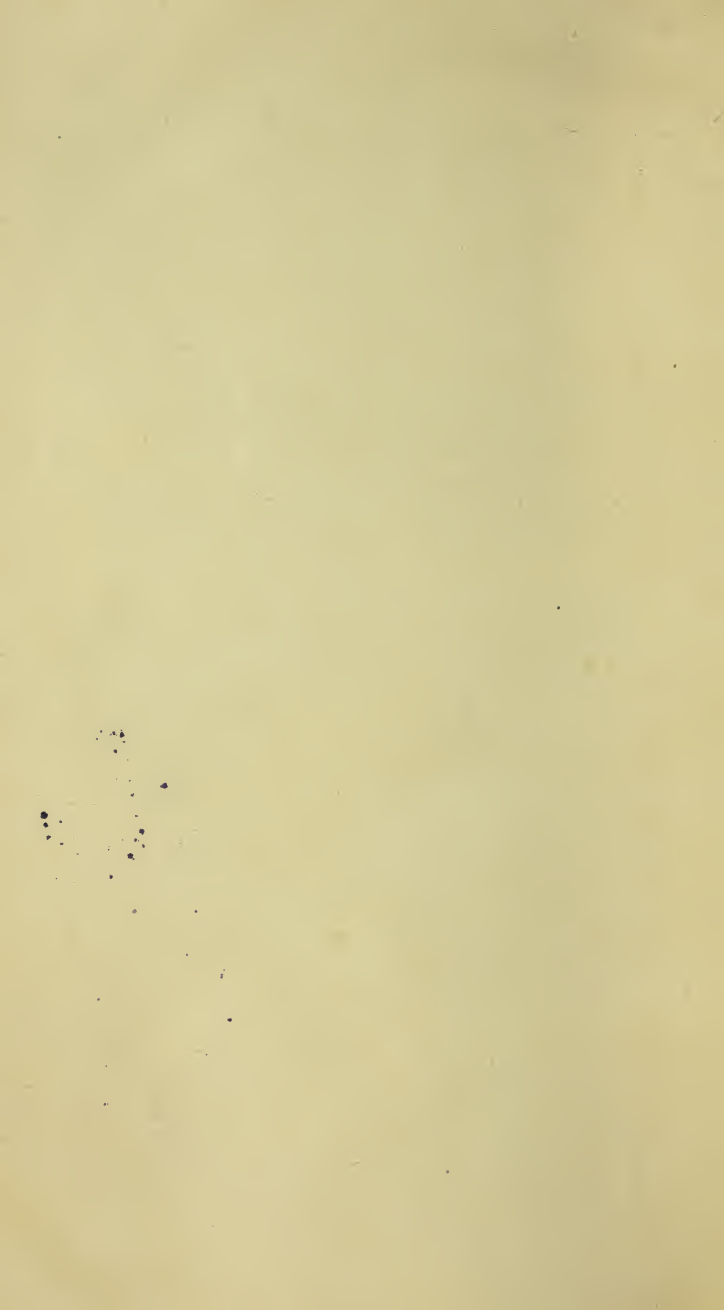
Fear not, then, the approach of man's last enemy, but, O, see that you be ready for him. See that you have not to conflict with him alone. "None but Christ, none but Christ," can help you then; without Him, the best spent life will make a shield that will drop into powder before the assault. You must be clothed in celestial armour, to meet uninjured the un-earthly attack. You must be "one with Christ, and Christ with you," to pass unharmed through the dark valley, to stem "the swellings of Jordan," to enter within the gates into the city. But if you are thus, "one with Christ," though you may be the weakest man, the most timid woman, or the feeblest

* Rev. xx. 6.

child, you shall be made more than conqueror over Satan, sin, and death, and over every enemy between time and eternity. All, without a single exception, who are Christ's here, shall be Christ's for ever; all who suffer with him, "shall also reign with him;" all shall unite in the song of Moses and of the Lamb, and shall say with one heart and one voice, "Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty, just and true are thy ways, thou King of Saints," "For thou wast slain and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood." "Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever."

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